Course Description

Shared by every mentally competent member of our species is an ability of amazing flexibility and complexity: language. On first consideration, it seems very simple. Language develops so naturally that even children can use it well. But as we will see upon closer inspection, this evident simplicity masks extreme complexity. Despite decades of serious work, computers capable of true, wide-ranging conversation are still just science fiction, and it is a matter of considerable debate whether other species of animals have anything that can really be called language.

A deep understanding of how language works is inextricably tied to an understanding of our cognitive processes: language is a window on the mind, telling us a great deal about what it means to be a human and a thinker. During this term, we will closely examine language in its various parts and components, study how the brain is used in language comprehension and production (and what happens when things go wrong), and consider how language and mind interrelate. We will examine how humans acquire language, how these processes compare to animal and computational communication systems, and discover how much we may not even know we know about our language ability.

Required Text


Additional articles may be placed on reserve (electronic or library).

Course Objectives

• To attempt to understand the complex human language capability, so that we may use it better.
• To study the workings of the brain and mind in the process of learning and using language.
• To acquire a working knowledge of the vocabulary and principles of the science of language, so we may discuss language more precisely.
• To dispel common myths about language, to become better “linguistic consumers.”
• To identify the similarities and differences between the communication systems used by humans and animals.

Course Requirements

• Participation
  - Attendance/Active engagement 10%
  - Problem sets, short papers, quizzes 10%
• Exam #1 (10/3) 25%
• Exam #2 (11/7) 25%

Option:

• Exam #3 (Part A: 12/7; Part B-essay: 12/12) 30%
• Paper & Presentation
  - Conference w/ VB (Wk. 7 or 8) 2%
  - Prospectus (due 10/29) 3%
  - Paper due (12/10) 15%
  - Presentation (12/10 or 12/12) 10%

TOTAL 100%
Details of Course Requirements

Attendance Policy
Regular attendance, preparation, and participation are required to keep up with the pace of ideas and information exchange in this class. I will frequently explain examples or topics not covered in the book or put on reserve or e-mail. It is also your responsibility to read the material before class and to come prepared to discuss it, and to arrange for someone to pick up any handouts or lend you notes if you miss class.

You learn linguistics by doing it; thus, active engagement in class participation is very important. If you miss class, you deprive yourself of important practice and information, as well as depriving the class of your viewpoint and ideas. Each unexcused class absence after the first counts -1 point of the attendance grade. Missing more than five class periods zeroes out 10% of your grade. Be sure to notify me in writing of any legitimately excusable absences—in advance, if possible.

Preparation for class
Come to class with the assignment read! This will enable you to join in the discussion and to ask informed questions. Generally, on Mondays, there are problem sets or other assignments due, but at any point, when I feel that students aren’t keeping up with the reading, I may give a short pop quiz. Much of the material in the book is quite detailed linguistically. My lectures and notes will give guidance on where to focus, but are not the sole basis of what we will cover.

Problem sets
The assignments are designed to help you practice linguistic problem solving or to get you thinking about issues in the study of language. You may work together on them, but do not simply copy others’ answers. These questions represent the kinds of questions you will be asked on exams.

Turn the problem sets or papers in at the start of class on the due date. We will discuss the answers that day (so be sure to keep a copy for yourself). Late problem sets will receive no credit, but it is important for you to practice doing the problems in any case. All assignments will be graded credit/no credit; credit will be given for completed assignments, and those where there is a clear attempt to solve every problem. Missing, copied, or incomplete assignments that suggest lack of effort will receive no credit. Please do these carefully, and raise any difficulties during the class discussion. In class, I will ask different students to present solutions to the questions. Your readiness and ability to answer during this time will be counted as part of your participation grade. If you are not present or are unprepared, this will count against you.

Examinations
The three examinations generally cover the material of that section of class, but the material in some instances builds on previous work, so some questions may be comprehensive (e.g., the essays, especially for Exam #3, Part B). The exams often build on the exercises covered in the problem sets, which employ the kinds of analysis that linguists use to address problems and issues in language. The exams will have some short answer, multiple choice, and/or matching questions as well as essays. Again, it is critical to read the texts. I cannot cover all material in the class, and I will assume that you will be familiar with the general issues and approaches of the texts.

NOTE: Students may opt to do a paper rather than the 3rd exam.

Discussion/Research Paper & Presentation
Students have the option of doing a paper rather than Exam #3. You will meet with me to select a topic for research and presentation to the rest of the class. These presentations (5-7 min.) may be done in small groups. Sample topics include:
A presentation on some topic of linguistic interest in the news via public media, as it relates to the topics of the class (focus on Language and Mind issues, rather than Language in Society; check with me for suitable topics).

Participation in a debate about whether animals have language, or whether computers will be able to talk like humans.

An analysis of a set of cartoons, discussing their linguistic significance and relation to class material.

Research on another topic of mutual interest and application to the subjects of the class.

Paper/presentation option, order of events

Students will:

a) meet with Prof. Bergvall to discuss possible topics (Wk 7 or 8)
b) write a short prospectus (1-2 pp.) outlining the topic and possible sources (due 10/29).
c) conduct research on some topic relevant to the course,
d) use and appropriately document sources (4-10, including peer-evaluated citations).
e) submit a 4-5-page paper, with graphics and appropriate citations; this will be in a portfolio that includes a previous draft, prospectus, etc. (Due Wk 14, 12/10.)
f) make a class presentation using visual aids (Wk 14).

It is critical to keep copies of all stages of work to submit with your final portfolio, from research notes to final form; if you work in a group, you need to keep a separate copy for your own portfolio. I will give more details on this process and the project later in the semester.

Academic Integrity

Linguists often do their best work in consultation with others; in fact, we must observe how people talk in order to gather our data. But data are not solutions. Taking the work of others and passing it off as your own is academic theft and will be punishable by failing the assignment/course or dismissal from school. Cases of plagiarism will be turned over to the Dean of Students' Office.

You may consult with others as you work on take-home problem sets, but you will hurt yourself if you simply copy others' answers. All exams must be done on your own.

You may also consult with others on your research papers, but you must document all sources used, and you must write up the final form of the paper yourself (or clearly document your contributions to a group project).

We will discuss the proper practice of research and citation during the term. See me or visit the Writing Center if you have any questions about appropriate research processes.

ADA NOTE

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Dean of Students (x7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (x7-3310).

Schedule of Course Assignments

The following schedule is subject to change to meet class needs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chap. 1: What is Language? (pp. 3-34)</td>
<td>9/5 Introduction, Goals, Lg, Mind, Brain, &amp; Knowledge</td>
<td>9/14 What you don't know you know about lang: PS#1 due</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>(Chap. 1, cont.) Hauser, Chomsky, &amp; Fitch (p df-opt.)</td>
<td>9/10 De-prescription &amp; Universal Grammar</td>
<td>9/12 Design features Symbols, Icons</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Chap. 2: Brain &amp; Lg (pp. 35-67)</td>
<td>9/17 Modularity, brain structures, aphasia</td>
<td>9/19 Language &amp; thought Critical periods</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Chap. 3: Morphology (pp. 71-114 &amp; Chap. 11: 472-8)</td>
<td>9/24 Vowels, transcription</td>
<td>9/26 Identifying morphemes</td>
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<td>10/1 Minimal units of meaning, words</td>
<td>9/28 New words How language changes</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Chap. 4: Syntax (pp. 115-72)</td>
<td>9/29 Word categories, linearity of language</td>
<td>10/10 Phrase structure rules, hierarchy in language</td>
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<td>10/15 Colorless Green ideas</td>
<td>10/13 Syntax: complex rules, long-distance relationships</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Chap. 5: Semantics (pp. 173-219)</td>
<td>10/17 Vowels, transcription IPA, Consonants</td>
<td>10/19 How does meaning happen? Word meaning</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Chap. 6: Phonetics (pp. 221-54)</td>
<td>10/22 Sentence meaning Pragmatics</td>
<td>10/26 Vowels, transcription</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Chap. 7: Phonology (pp. 255-299)</td>
<td>10/24 Speech Sounds IPA, Consonants</td>
<td>11/2 Sound rules, minimal pairs</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Chap. 8: Language Acq. (pp. 313-62)</td>
<td>10/29 Transcription; writing Pragmatics</td>
<td>11/6 1st language acquisition</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chap. 8: Language Acq. (pp. 313-62)</td>
<td>11/5 Language acquisition Sound classes, allophones</td>
<td>11/10 Can Chimps Talk?</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Chap. 8: Language Acq. (pp. 313-62)</td>
<td>11/12 Video: Playing the Language Game</td>
<td>11/14 Language: 2nd language acquisition</td>
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<td>12/5 Computational Lx AI</td>
<td>11/18 Linguistics in the media</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Animals (Review Chap. 1 &amp; 384-390)</td>
<td>11/28 Bees, birds, Clever Hans, whales, dolphins</td>
<td>11/30 Can Chimps Talk?</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Chap. 9: Language Proc. (pp. 363-406)</td>
<td>12/3 Human &amp; Computer processing of language</td>
<td>12/6 1st Language Acquisition: Part 1 (Chimp)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Lg &amp; Society (pp. 409-477+)</td>
<td>12/6 STUDENT TALKS OR DIACReS</td>
<td>12/14 SUMMARY Implications</td>
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