HU2910 Language and Mind
Syllabus, Summer 2012

Contact & Course Information
Professor: Victoria Bergvall
Course online at Canvas: https://mtu.instructure.com/
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Personal website: http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~vbergval
Class list: hu2910-su12-L
Office hours: online via e-mail or Canvas

Course Description
Every mentally competent member of our species shares an ability of amazing flexibility and complexity: language, which many describe as the quintessential human skill. On the one hand, language seems very simple: it develops so naturally and quickly that even 3-year-old children can use it well. On the other hand, 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 really have language.

A deep understanding of how language works requires and leads to 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 consider what it means to know (a) language; study how the brain is used to comprehend and produce language (and what happens when things go wrong) and consider how language and mind interrelate. We will closely examine language in its various parts and components. 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(s)
• Additional .pdf articles may be made available on Canvas.

Course Objectives
• To examine the component parts that comprise our 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, animals, and machines.
Course Prerequisites
• UN1001 Perspectives on Inquiry (may be taken concurrently)

Course Requirements
• Participation 35%
  - Timely completion of appointed tasks 5%
  - Participation in online discussions 15%
  - Problem sets, short papers, quizzes 15%

• Exams 50%
  - Exam #1 25%
  - Exam #2 25%

• Linguistics analysis/research report 15%
  - Proposal of a relevant topic
  - Posting of a 2-3 page draft to a small group for peer review
  - Final draft of paper

TOTAL 100%

Grading System

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<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade points/credit</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92% &amp; above</td>
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<td>Excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>AB</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82% - 86.9%</td>
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<td>CD</td>
<td>67% - 71.9%</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>Below average</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60% - 66.9%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59.9% and below</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>Incomplete; given only when a student is unable to complete a segment of the course because of circumstances beyond the student’s control. A grade of incomplete may be given only when approved in writing by the Chair of Humanities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Conditional, with no grade points per credit; given only when the student is at fault in failing to complete a minor segment of a course, but in the judgment of the instructor does not need to repeat the course. It must be made up within the next semester in residence or the grade becomes a failure (F). A (X) grade is computed into the grade point average as a (F) grade.</td>
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Details of Course Requirements & Policies

Online “Attendance” Policy
Regular 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. You learn linguistics by doing it; thus, active
engagement in class is very important. Be sure to notify me in writing of any legitimately excusable absences—in advance, if possible.

**Preparation for class**

Try to begin each module by reading the text first. This will enable you to join in the discussion and to ask informed questions. Generally, there are problem sets or other assignments due for each module (roughly 2 modules per week this summer). 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. I will expect you to read and extend your knowledge offline.

**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 to solve problem sets, but do not simply copy others’ answers.** These questions represent the kinds of questions you will be asked on exams, and the problem sets provide critical practice.

Any assignment turned in online MUST contain your name and the subject line “<lastname>HU2910 PS#_” so that I can find it easily. **No credit will be given for improperly submitted assignments.**

Turn the problem sets or papers by the deadlines noted. **Late problem sets will receive reduced credit within a certain timeframe, or NO credit beyond that, but it is important for you to practice doing the problems in any case.** Please do these carefully, and raise any difficulties during the class discussion.

**Examinations**

The two examinations generally cover the material of that section of class, but the material in some instances builds on previous work, so some questions will be comprehensive. 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.

**Research Project**

You will participate actively in the construction of knowledge in this course by researching an approved topic of related linguistic interest as represented in the media, and reporting it to others within a small group. You will read and do peer-evaluations on their papers, and you should consider their responses as you revise your paper for final credit. **Remember: the focus is on issues of language, mind, and brain** (rather than, for example, Language in Society). I expect you to research and cite a number of reputable, peer-reviewed sources, and to present them to me in an annotated bibliography to accompany your written paper.

**Keep copies of all stages of research on hand until you receive a final grade for the course, from research notes and sources to final form, in order to document and**
substantiate that this is your own research. If you work in a group, you need to keep a separate copy for your own portfolio, and to write me a memo detailing your contribution to the whole project. I will give more details on this process and the project later in the semester.

Other Important Course Policies

Academic Integrity
Researchers often do their best work together, in consultation with others. However, 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. See details about Michigan Tech’s Academic Integrity definitions, policies, and enforcement procedures at http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html.

You may consult with others on your papers for this class, 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 Multiliteracies Center (http://www.hu.mtu.edu/hu_dept/facilities/multilit_center.php) if you have any questions about appropriate research processes or writing concerns.

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Programs
Michigan Tech strives to offer equal opportunity to all of its employees, students, applicants for employment, and applicants for admission without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, height, weight, marital status, disabled veteran status, veteran status, arrest record, or disability.

The Affirmative Programs Office (commonly called the Affirmative Action Office, or AAO) facilitates Michigan Tech’s development of an environment that is free from prejudicial discrimination or harassment and that is conducive to learning and individual growth for all campus members and visitors. See http://www.admin.mtu.edu/AAO/.

For more information, contact the Affirmative Programs Office, Room 308, Administration Building; Phone: 906-487-3310, Fax: 906-487-2842, Director: Jill Hodges, Ph.D., email: jhodges@mtu.edu

Accommodation for Disabilities
MTD 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 see the Dean of Students (487-2212) as soon as possible. See the student handbook regarding Disability Services: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/dos/disability.htm.

For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, the Chair or Dean of your academic unit, the Humanities department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).
Schedule of Course Assignments

The accompanying schedule presents my best estimate of the progress through the class; it maybe subject to change to meet class needs, upon formal notification to the class members. On the online syllabus, which will have the course readings and assignments specified, you may not see individual parts until the relevant week/module is made live week by week.

The general format of the course will work like this.

Each module (roughly 2 per week, to track with the compressed summer semester equivalent to a 14 week semester) will have similar parts:
1) a reading assignment that you should do each week before or alongside my powerpoints.
2) audible powerpoints that encapsulate my lectures.
3) short problem sets or writing assignments that go along with the different parts, to make sure you understand the concepts from that module;
4) class discussions (posting to a class discussion list, with required initial responses and feedback/responses to others' posts)

There will be two exams, roughly at the ends of Week 3 and Week 6, and a final project during Week 7 that consists of a short 2-3 page report, plus a short annotated bibliography of your sources, on the applications of linguistics; it must be created specifically for this class and address topics and issues we have covered over the course of the term. Your report will be initially posted to a 4-5-person working group for peer review, then revised and submitted to me. Sample topics might be include an analysis of a language constructed for a film or TV show (e.g., Dothraki for HBO’s Game of Thrones or Elvish for Tolkein’s Lord of the Rings); an analysis of a current story in the news having to do with linguistic research (e.g., whether baboons can recognize real vs. nonsense words); a deeper assessment of the linguistic capacity of IBM's Watson, etc. You must submit a proposal to me and receive approval on it before undertaking this analysis. You must cite your sources clearly and accurately, and make clear how your analysis of this topic relates to this class.

Brief Schedule of Modules

WEEK 1
- Module 1A: Introduction: the knowledge of language
  o Readings: Language Files 1.0-1.5
  o Problem set from Language File 1.6
- Module 1B: Language in the brain
  o Readings: Language Files 9.1-9.2

WEEK 2
- Module 2A: Language and thought
  o Readings: Readings: Language Files 11.2
  o Online debate link: Economist debate between Boroditsky and Liberman: http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/626
- Module 2B: Morphology
  o Readings: Language Files 4.0-4.5
  o Problem set from Language File 4.6
WEEK 3
- Module 3A: Phonetics
  o Readings: Language Files 2.0-2.7
  o Problem set from Language File 2.8
- Module 3B: Phonology
  o Readings: Language Files 3.0-3.3
- Review
- EXAM #1

WEEK 4
- Module 4A: Syntax
  o Readings: Language Files 5.0-5.5
  o Problem set from Language File 5.6
- Module 4B: Semantics
  o Readings: Language Files 6.0-6.4
  o Problem set from Language File 6.5

WEEK 5
- Module 5A: Pragmatics
  o Readings: Language Files 7.0-7.5
  o Problem set from Language File 7.6
- Module 5B: Language acquisition
  o Readings: Language Files 8.0-8.5
  o Problem set from Language File 8.6
- Module 5C: Computers and language
  o Readings: Language Files 16.0-16.5

WEEK 6
- Module 6A: Animal Communication: Bees, Birds, Clever Hans, Cetaceans
  o Readings: Language Files 14.0-14.3
- Module 6B: Animal Communication: Apes
  o Readings: Language Files 14.0-14.3
- Review
- EXAM #2

WEEK 7
- Module 7A: Real world applications, jobs, and careers in linguistics
  o Readings: Language Files 17.0-17.6
- Module 7B: Research projects: exchange and discussion
- FINAL PAPER SUBMISSION
- Final statement: What I learned