

About the Production and Perception of Language

First, think of something poetic to say. Then, find the words and syntax to convey the message with clarity and wit. To give voice to the words, convert them to a series of consonants and vowels, and produce the associated gestures of articulation. Don't worry about acoustic propagation—the compliance of the atmosphere will accomplish that, conveying the signal to the listener. Your conversational mate will find acoustic attributes within the signal that distinguish consonants and vowels, will reprise the segmental series, and from it, will apprehend the words, syntax and meaning of your utterance. (“Tell me, O Muse...”)

The phenomena of language have framed and propelled much of contemporary psychology. Psychologists have sought to understand how, by hearing the sounds that a talker makes, a listener perceives a message, and not simply the sound nor the articulatory mechanics that produced it. Spoken communication is dependent on a linguistic as well as a physical medium, and in Psychology G4232y we will expose the classic and contemporary research conducted in this vein on the perception of speech. We will start with several comprehensive reports and reviews; we will sample a variety of perceptual accounts, some based on the models of psychophysics and others on less rarefied circumstances (speech perception on the corner); and, we will spotlight several recent and promising manifestations of the classic themes. In every case, we will read the work of the scientists ourselves, as we reported the evidence and proposed interpretations.

How to get into this course

Permission of the instructor is required to enroll in this course. A course in Psychology above the 1000 level pertinent to the perceptual or linguistic topics of G4232y may be sufficient to obtain permission. In some circumstances, relevant courses in Biology, Computer Science, or Philosophy may be acceptable preparation. Please attend the first meeting at 6:10 PM on January 18 in 214 Milbank or contact Professor Remez with your question about the seminar (854-4247; remez@columbia.edu).