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, OMuse…”)

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 legendary 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 themselves, as they reported the evidence and proposed interpretations.

About Psychology G4232y

At each weekly meeting several topics will be discussed. Sessions will be led by a member of the seminar, and chronicled by a designated rapporteur. Each member will take several turns leading the group and reporting the discussion over the course of the semester; your instructor will take a few turns, too. One or more readings will be assigned each week from a collection of journal articles and conference reports available on reserve at the Psychology Library.

Chronicle

Within a week of leading a session, the rapporteur will post a brief, written chronicle of the discussion on the seminar website. The chronicle will summarize the research that launched the discussion, the key questions identified by the leader, and the contributions made by other members of the seminar.

Grades

Your grade in this course will be based on the quality and appropriateness of your participation in discussions; on the thoughtfulness and skill that you exhibit in expressing the scientific issues when leading the discussion; and on the astuteness with which you chronicle the seminar.

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.
READINGS

January 20: General Overview and Organizational Meeting.


February 3: Articulatory and Acoustic Basis of Segmental Contrasts: Vowels.


February 17: Perception in the Psychophysics Laboratory.

February 24: Perception as Information Processing.


March 23: Speech Perception on the Corner, Part III. Integrative Perceptual Acts

March 30: Perceptual Organization of Speech.


April 20: Concurrent Identification of Words and Talkers.

April 27: Veterinary Cases of Phonetic Perception.