About Perception and Language

In an ordinary day, we talkative humans engage in many tender, inane, critical, inconceivable, and exhilarating conversations. Why do we do it?

Who knows? We have been concocting bad answers to this existential question for several thousand years, and we still have not decided on a formula we like. But, if we ask a more recent and useful question—How do we actually do it?—then we find that we have a lot to learn, because the answer depends on discovering and describing specific aspects of human nature, rather than pondering the metaphysical significance of life on earth and our place in the universe.

For an answer to the question, “How do we do it?” we need to know about perception, generally. This is the branch of psychology that seeks to explain how the senses work. Remember, the senses provide the means by which you know about the objects you encounter and the events in which you participate, and provide a means to guide action. And, we need to know specifically about the sounds of speech, about the perceptually critical properties of words and phrases and utterances, and about the conversion of meaning to sound and back again. By putting the perceptual and linguistic pieces together, we are able to understand how the noises people make when we talk make sense to us when we listen.

About Psychology 3164Y

The required readings for Psychology 3164Y include several tutorial articles:


and the textbook:


Three books are also recommended:


The philosophical discussion offered by Fodor examines the metatheory, acknowledged or not, of cognitive studies of language. The thin volume by Ladefoged presents a tutorial on the physical
acoustics of speech, with some preliminary discussion of speech sounds. Last, the introductory linguistics text by Weisler and Milekic is intended for your reference if the terminology and concepts of linguistics are unfamiliar to you. Required and recommended books are available at Labyrinth Books. Additional recommended readings are available through Courseworks@Columbia. Suggestions and recommendations to guide your reading appear throughout the agenda.

Requirements

There will be one lecture/discussion session each week. Weekly reading and writing assignments are detailed in the syllabus. At intervals during the semester, your grasp of the course material will be evaluated in examinations. The exams will be a take-home essay.

You are required to prepare a brief account of any recent perceptual study relevant to the themes of the course. Specific instructions will be distributed in class, soon. The paper will be due on April 8.

Your grade in the course will be based on your performance in exams and on your execution of the paper. Informal measures of intellectual progress will also be based your knowledgeable and sensible participation in class.

How to Get Into This Course

Prerequisites for PSYC BC 3164Y include PSYC BC 1001 and one course from this list: 1105, 1108, 1117, 1127, 1130, or equivalent. The class roster will be determined at the beginning of the first meeting on January 22.

Cautions

There will be no make-up exams. Please take a moment to note the scheduled exams. If you cannot participate in the exams as scheduled, you may not register for this class.

Under no circumstances will a grade of Incomplete be assigned without a legitimate medical excuse.

PLEASE NOTE: You may take notes in class on a laptop computer in mute mode. However, the use of flash cameras, cell phones, pagers, personal digital assistants and other beeping, buzzing, clicking and blinking technology is not permitted during class meetings unless it is required to preserve life. A student whose technological accessories disrupt class will be dismissed and a grade of W will be assigned for the semester.

PLEASE NOTE: A student who requires accommodation for a specific disability must notify the Office for Disability Services and the instructor at the close of the first class meeting.
## Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic &amp; Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 22</td>
<td>Introduction to Perception and Language</td>
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| Jan 29     | The traditional psychological approach, and Chomsky’s critique  
            | Read: Carroll: Chapters 1 & 2;  
            | Chomsky: *Verbal behavior*  
            | Writing assignment: Behaviorism at room temperature |
| Feb 5      | The problem of serial order  
            | Read: Lashley  
            | Writing assignment: Plans, decisions and necessities in action |
| Feb 12     | Perceiving, remembering and speaking  
            | Read: Carroll: Chapter 3  
            | Recommended: Levelt; Fodor  
            | Writing assignment: Perceiving, remembering, speaking |
| Feb 19     | What makes the sound?  
            | Read: Brown, *The analysis of speech*  
            | Recommended: Ladefoged, Chapters 1-5  
            | Writing assignment: Characteristic and distinctive attributes |
| Feb 26     | Speech perception  
            | Read: Carroll: Chapter 4: pp. 68-87  
            | Recommended: Ladefoged: Chapters 6, 7  
            | Writing assignment: Bigfoot, Yeti and ET |
| Mar 4      | Invariance: Circumstantial, personal, and linguistic  
            | Read: Fant; Pardo & Remez  
            | Writing assignment: Midterm exam |
| Mar 11     | Hearing voices: Models of speech perception  
            | Read: Klatt |
| Mar 18     | SPRING BREAK |
| Mar 25     | Where do words go when you stop talking?  
            | Read: Carroll: Chapter 5  
            | Writing assignment: A word to the wise... |
| Apr 1      | Sentences and utterances  
            | Read: Carroll: Chapters 6, 8  
            | Writing assignment: Slips of the ear |
| Apr 8      | Catching someone’s drift  
            | Read: Carroll: Chaps 7, 9  
            | ✍ Paper due ✍ |
| Apr 15     | Frontiers 1: Figurative language  
            | Read: Handout: *Frozen Expressions*; Searle  
            | Writing assignment: Drunk as a skunk |
| Apr 22     | Frontiers 2: The bionic conversationalist  
            | Read: Zue & Glass  
            | Writing assignment: Like, unique... |
| Apr 29     | Frontiers 3: The hairy, brainy conversationalist  
            | Read: Carroll: Chapter 13; Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch  
            | ! Potential Rescheduling Hazard! |
| May 9-16   | FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD ✍️ |