

**Grand Valley State University**  
**Syllabus**  
**PSY 357-01 and 03: Psychology of Language, Winter Semester, 2022**

**Instructor Information**

Name: Benjamin Swets, Ph.D., Professor  
Office hours: TTh 1:15 – 2:15pm, or by appointment. Please email me to make appointments.  
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Phone: (616) 331-2169

**Class Time and Place**

Section 03: TTh 10:00 am - 11:15 am 174 LOH  
Section 01: TTh 11:30 am - 12:45 pm 174 LOH

**Prerequisites**

PSY 101 – Introductory Psychology

**Course Description (from GVSU)**

“Psychology of Language is a discipline that focuses on psychology's insights into human language. Topics include biological bases of language; human language and other communication systems; lexical, sentence, and discourse processing; speech production and perception; acquisition of spoken and written language; bilingualism; and the relationship between language and thought. Three credits. Offered fall and winter semesters.”

**Course Description (mine)**

It's easy to take language for granted. After all, it comes so easily to us that we barely have to think about it as we transform thoughts into words and sentences anyone can understand. But why does it come so easily? What kinds of cognitive events, of which we are almost never aware, must take place for us to understand and produce words and sentences? Can animals use language like we can? Is the ability to use language innate, or determined by the environment? Do we use language because we think, or do we think because we use language? This course will explore ways psychologists have tried to answer those questions, and others.

I also feel compelled to print this passage from your textbook (Harley, p. 19):

*Modern psychology is a science. That often comes as a surprise to students, many of whom think it's all going to be about Freud, or helping people, or helping them to understand themselves. Then they arrive at university and it's suddenly all statistics and computers and carrying out experiments. Psychology is harder than people think, and psycholinguistics is hardest of all: across the psychology degree curriculum it's usually the subject that most students find difficult to understand. It's difficult because the answers are complex; there's a great deal of terminology, and few definitive answers. Psycholinguistics is not for the faint-hearted; it's not for wimps. But because language is at the heart of what it means to be human, and is so central to so much of what we do, the study of psycholinguistics can be exceptionally rewarding.*

**Why Should You Take This Course?**

If you are interested in knowing how the human mind processes language, and have an appreciation for the scientific manner in which psychological science is conducted, this course will combine those two elements in a way that no other course at Grand Valley can. Language is also not a very well understood phenomenon by most people. We can use it automatically, but we rarely think about its basic mental mechanics. So, this course is an opportunity to gain more of a conscious understand of the way you use language. Also, if you are a Psychology major or minor, this course satisfies a departmental requirement.

## **Course Objectives**

After successful completion of the course the students will be able to

- Describe theories and research on the linguistic representation of language.
- Describe theories and research concerning the cognitive processes that foster language acquisition and enable skilled language production and comprehension, as well as biological and cultural perspectives on language.
- Evaluate and explain the scientific study of human language, including critically evaluating psycholinguistic theories and experimental results. I consider this course to be an opportunity to teach more than just WHAT we know about psycholinguistics. It is an opportunity to also teach HOW psycholinguistics is studied. Psychology is a science, and this course will emphasize that point. When you leave this course, you should be able to evaluate a psycholinguistic theory presented in a journal article based on the given set of experimental results.
- Explain the biological, social, and cultural influences on language processes.

## **Required Text**

Textbook: T. A. Harley (2017). *Talking the Talk: Language, Psychology and Science (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*. New York, NY: Psychology Press. Note: Although this textbook is required, it is acceptable for students to find the free, older edition of the textbook online, and use that instead.

## **Additional Readings**

At various times during the semester, additional readings will be assigned. These readings will be required, and will supplement the text and lecture. The instructor will announce and make the readings available on Blackboard, i.e., students will not be required to purchase them.

## **Course Webpage**

The instructor will maintain a course webpage using GVSU's Blackboard system. The webpage will contain pertinent course information, grades, lecture slides, announcements, readings, etc. The webpage is meant to supplement the lectures, not replace them. Students are responsible for all information provided in the lecture that may, or may not, be included on the web page.

## **Course Requirements**

*Quizzes/Assignments/Participation (50 points total)*: Throughout the semester, in-class assignments on the assigned reading will be given during lecture. The dates of these assignments will be determined randomly. *No make-up assignments will be administered*, but students may miss 1 in-class assignment without penalty. It is a good idea to do the reading assignments before the date on which they are listed—it is not possible to adequately complete these assignments without having done the reading first. Some of the assignments may be take-home assignments. You are also expected to contribute to class discussion. At least 10 of the points from this section will come from participation. Your contribution(s) may be a question, an answer to a question, or a comment.

*Online Quizzes and Assignments (50 points total)*: Students will be assessed online via a combination of low-stakes quizzes, written assignments, and discussion board activities throughout the semester. There will be limited time windows (typically 1-2 weeks long) during which these items can be completed, so it will be important to check Blackboard frequently to complete these assignments on time throughout the semester. *No make-up or late assignments from this category will be administered*, but students may miss 2 online quizzes/assignments without penalty (i.e., the three lowest scores from this category will be dropped).

*Exams (150 points total)*: There will be three exams worth 50 points apiece. Exam dates appear on the Course Schedule, below. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions that engage your understanding of course concepts. Questions may cover any information provided by the lecture, textbook, other readings, and supplementary classroom activities such as videos. Exams will not be cumulative.

## **Grading**

The Quizzes, Midterm Exams, and Final Exam will collectively be worth 250 points. Based on your cumulative point score the following grades will be assigned:

<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Grade</i>		
93 – 100%	A	73 – 76.99%	C
90 – 92.99%	A-	70 – 72.99%	C-
87 – 89.99%	B+	67 – 69.99%	D+
83 – 86.99%	B	60 – 66.99%	D
80 – 82.99%	B-	59.99% or less	F
77 – 79.99%	C+		

THE GRADING SCALE AS PRINTED ABOVE IS **FINAL!** Any changes in grading policy will be announced in class and on the course website.

## **Attendance**

There is no attendance requirement, but I strongly recommend attending class, for several reasons: 1) Quizzes, in-class assignments and participation comprise a large part of the grading of this course. 2) There will be material covered in class that will not be found in the text book, but will be found in exam questions. 3) Repeated and varied exposure to course material results in better memory and understanding of that material.

## **Emergencies and Schedule Conflicts**

Absences from exams related to participation in a university-sanctioned event, a personal illness, a family emergency, or a major religious holiday will be excused provided that you a) give the instructor at least one week advance notice (when the conflict is foreseeable) or a timely explanation upon your return (when the conflict is unforeseeable) and b) give the instructor written documentation from an appropriate faculty member, university administrator, physician, or clergy member. Make-up exams will be administered only if an absence from the exam is excused for one of the above reasons. Note that vacation is not considered a valid excuse. You may take a make-up exam either at another time on the normal exam day, or on the soonest possible date thereafter. An unexcused absence from an exam will constitute a score of 0.

## **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If there is any student in this class who has special needs because of learning, physical or other disability, please contact Disability Support Resources (DSR) at (616) 331-2490. I would be happy to help, but DSR is the proper channel. If you have a disability and think you will need assistance evacuating this classroom and/or building in an emergency situation, please make me aware so I can develop a plan to assist you.

## **Covid-19 Policies**

Masks will be required to attend class (<https://www.gvsu.edu/lakerstogether/face-covering-policy-27.htm>). Please wear masks in a way that covers both your mouth and nose.

Before attending class each session, you must complete the university's self-assessment of Covid-19 symptoms. (<https://www.gvsu.edu/hro/selfassessment-login.htm>).

The plan for the semester is to hold all class-related events in person, with no parallel remote attendance option. So please plan to attend class in person all semester. However, if the virus situation on campus gets worse, I am prepared to adjust the course in a way that keeps students safe.

## Tentative Course Schedule

MODULE	DATE	TOPIC(S)	READING	
1	Jan 11	Syllabus, Introduction		
	Jan 13	History and Practice of Psycholinguistics	Harley: Ch. 1, Carroll: Ch. 1	
	Jan 18	Linguistic Principles I: Phonology, Morphology	Carroll: Ch. 2	
	Jan 20	Linguistic Principles II: Syntax, Recursion		
	Jan 25	Linguistic Principles III: Modern Ideas		
	2	Jan 27	Human vs. Animal Communication	Harley: Ch. 2
Feb 1		Language and Thought I	Harley: Ch. 4, Pullum (1989)	
Feb 3		Language and Thought II		
Feb 8		Speech Perception I	Harley: pp. 129 - 138	
Feb 10		Speech Perception II, Review Session		
Feb 15		<b>EXAM I: Modules 1 and 2</b>		
3		Feb 17	Reading	Harley, pp. 138-151
	Feb 22	Sentence Comprehension: Modularity I	Harley: 164-178	
	Feb 24	Sentence Comprehension: Modularity II		
	Mar 1	Sentence Comprehension: Beyond Modularity	Tanenhaus et al. (1995)	
	Mar 3	Sentence Production: Errors and Models	Harley: 193-200; Ferreira et al. (2002)	
4	Mar 8	<b>NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK</b>		
	Mar 10	<b>NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK</b>		
	Mar 15	Sentence Production II: Planning and Dialogue	Harley: pp. 209-215;	
	Mar 17	Conversational Interaction I	Branigan et al. (2000)	
	Mar 22	Conversational Interaction II, Review	Harley: pp. 184-186, 215-216	
	Mar 24	<b>EXAM II: Modules 3 and 4</b>		
	5	Mar 29	Early Language Acquisition	Harley: pp. 42-54
		Mar 31	Later Language Acquisition	Harley: pp. 54-57
Apr 5		Acquisition: School Years	Harley: pp. 73-78, 151-160	
6	Apr 7	The Critical Period Hypothesis I	Harley: pp. 67-73	
	Apr 12	The Critical Period Hypothesis II	Snow & H.-H., 1978	
	Apr 14	Theories of Biological Innateness	Harley: pp. 58-67	
	Apr 19	Brain and Language I	Harley: pp. 216-220	
	Apr 21	Brain and Language II, Review Session	Van Berkum	

*The above schedule is tentative. Any changes in the schedule will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.*

**Exam III: Section 3 (1:00 section):** Tuesday, April 21, 12:00 pm - 1:50 pm

**Section 3 (2:30 section):** Thursday, April 23, 2:00 pm - 3:50 pm

Note: You must take the final exam with the section in which you are registered.

## **Caveat**

All of the information included in this syllabus, including the course schedule, assignments, and grading procedure, is subject to change. Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and on the course webpage.

*This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>*

## **Academic Integrity**

**Section STU 4.0 of GVSU's Student Code contains very specific information about maintaining academic integrity. It states:** "The principles of academic honesty and integrity are fundamental to a community of scholars. The University expects that students will not engage in acts of academic dishonesty in curricular and non-curricular academic activities. Engaging in academic dishonesty compromises the integrity of university grades, and scholarship and research.

Academic dishonesty is defined as actions or behaviors that misrepresent one's contributions to or the results of any scholarly product submitted for credit, evaluation, or dissemination. This definition includes, but is not limited to, fabrication, falsification, cheating, and plagiarism. Terms are defined as the following:

- Cheating is defined as attempting to use materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise that have not been allowed by the instructor.
- Plagiarism is defined as offering the work of someone else as one's own. The language or ideas taken from another may range from isolated formulas, sentences, or paragraphs to entire articles copied from books, periodicals, speeches or the writings of other students. Academic dishonesty compromises the integrity of grades, meaning that all academic work should be done by the student to whom it is assigned without unauthorized aid.

### **Students will comply with the following rules, when engaging in coursework:**

1. No student shall knowingly, without authorization, procure, provide or accept any materials which contain questions or answers to any examination or assignment.
2. No student shall, without authorization, complete, in part or in total, any examination or assignment for another person.
3. No student shall, without authorization, allow any examination or assignment to be completed, in part or in total, by another person.
4. No student shall knowingly plagiarize or copy the work of another person and submit it as his/her own.
5. No student shall submit work that has been previously graded, or is being submitted concurrently to more than one course, without authorization from the instructor(s) of the class(es) to which the student wishes to submit it.

## **PROCEDURES**

When the instructor feels that action beyond a failing course grade is warranted, the instructor will report the incident at [www.gvsu.edu/conduct](http://www.gvsu.edu/conduct) and request additional action via the University Conduct Process. When the alleged violation is related to the Academic Honesty - Integrity of Scholarships and Grades, the Hearing Body shall be composed of faculty members.

It is the instructor's responsibility to establish a classroom atmosphere that fosters academic honesty on the part of the students. If any instance of academic dishonesty is discovered by an instructor, they will notify the student and discuss the incident. After discussing the instance with the student, the instructor will make a decision. Depending on the instructor's judgment of the particular case, they may do nothing, impose additional course requirements, ask the student to repeat the work in question, or give a failing grade for the assignment, examination or the entire course. Any time an instructor addresses a violation of Academic Honesty with a failing grade on an assignment or in a course, they must report the incident at [www.gvsu.edu/conduct](http://www.gvsu.edu/conduct). Other incidents may be reported for tracking purposes. Reporting the incident will notify the Department Chair, the Dean of Students, and the Dean(s) of the Instructional Colleges. Reporting the incident does not automatically initiate additional action, but keeps record of the incident. Students may utilize the Academic Grievance Process to appeal a faculty initiated decision."