

Grand Valley State University
Syllabus
PSY 357-02: Psychology of Language, Winter Semester, 2017

Instructor Information

Name: Benjamin Swets, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Office hours: TTh 10-11 am or by appointment. Please email me to make appointments
Office location: 2217 Au Sable Hall
Email: swetsb@gvsu.edu. Reaching me by email is generally much easier than reaching me by phone.
Phone: (616) 331-2169

Class Time and Place

TTh 11:30 am – 12:45 pm 2146 ASH

Prerequisites

Although students in PSY 357 need not have passed PSY 101 as a prerequisite, I would not recommend taking this course before having done so. PSY 101 introduces many concepts that we will continue to work with in this course, and I will assume that you have an understanding of basic properties of experiments, such as identifying an independent variable. I will also assume that you come with an understanding of the cognitive and neuroscience material that is covered in PSY 101.

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. Moreover, the study of language is foundational to the emerging, interdisciplinary field known as cognitive science: Cognitive psychology, linguistics, zoology, evolutionary theory, computer science, and neuroscience often rely crucially on the theory and research of psycholinguistics. So, taking this course can serve as something of an introduction to cognitive science. Also, if you are a Psychology major, this course satisfies a departmental requirement.

Course Goals

- To survey theory and data on the psychology of language, including comprehension, production, acquisition, as well as biological and cultural perspectives on language.
- To learn how human language is studied, i.e., to learn the scientific method of studying language. 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.
- To read and critically evaluate primary research literature in psycholinguistics. 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.
- To observe and evaluate trends and themes in contemporary psycholinguistic research.

Required Text

Textbook: T. A. Harley (2010). *Talking the Talk: Language, Psychology and Science*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.

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, short quizzes and in-class assignments on the assigned reading will be given during lecture. The dates of these quizzes and assignments will be determined randomly. *No make-up quizzes will be administered*, but students may miss 1 quiz/in-class assignment without penalty. It is a good idea to do the reading assignments before the date on which they are listed. Some of the assignments may be take-home assignments. You are also expected to contribute to class discussion. At least 5 of the points from this section will come from participation. Your contribution may be a question, an answer to a question, or a comment.

Midterm Exams (100 points total): There will be two midterm exams worth 50 points apiece. Exam dates appear on the Course Schedule, below. Midterms 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. Midterms will not be cumulative.

Final Exam (75 points): The final exam will consist of multiple choice questions. Some of the points on the final exam will come from the final course unit, and the remaining questions could be on any topic from any time in the course. Therefore, some of the final exam will be cumulative, and some will be like a Midterm Exam.

Grading

The Quizzes, Midterm Exams, and Final Exam will collectively be worth 225 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.

Tentative Course Schedule

DATE	TOPIC(S)	READING
Jan 10	Syllabus, Introduction	
Jan 12	Linguistic Principles I	Harley: Ch. 1, Carroll: Ch. 1
Jan 17	Linguistic Principles II	Carroll: Ch. 2
Jan 19	Linguistic Principles III	
Jan 24	Human vs. Animal Communication	Harley: Ch. 2
Jan 26	Language and Thought I	Harley: Ch. 4, Pullum (1989)
Jan 31	Language and Thought II	
Feb 2	Speech Perception	Harley: pp. 145 - 154
Feb 7	Spillover, Review Session	
Feb 9	EXAM I	
Feb 14	Reading	Harley, pp. 154-170
Feb 16	Sentence Comprehension: The Modularity Debate I	Harley: 187-204
Feb 21	Sentence Comprehension: The Modularity Debate II	Tanenhaus et al. (1995)
Feb 23	Sentence Comprehension: Beyond Modularity	Ferreira et al. (2002)
Feb 28	Sentence Production: Errors and Models	Harley: pp. 221-229
Mar 2	Sentence Production II: Planning and Dialogue	Harley: pp. 240-246; Branigan et al. (2000)
Mar 7	NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK	
Mar 9	NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK	
Mar 14	Conversational Interaction	Harley: pp. 210-213, 247
Mar 16	Spillover, Review Session	
Mar 21	EXAM II	
Mar 23	Early Language Acquisition	Harley: pp.49-62
Mar 28	Later Language Acquisition	Harley: pp. 62-66
Mar 30	Applied Acquisition: Reading and Bilingualism	Harley: pp. 83-87, 171-182
Apr 4	The Critical Period Hypothesis I	Harley: pp. 77-83
Apr 6	NO CLASS	
Apr 11	The Critical Period Hypothesis II	Snow & H.-H., 1978
Apr 13	Theories of Biological Innateness	Harley: pp. 66-76
Apr 18	Brain and Language I	Harley: pp. 248-253
Apr 20	Brain and Language II, Review Session	Van Berkum, 2008

Final Exam: Wednesday, April 26, 12:00 pm – 1:50 pm

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

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.

Academic Integrity

Section 223.00 of GVSU's Student Code contains very specific information about maintaining academic integrity. It states: "The principles of truth and honesty are recognized as fundamental to a community of teachers and scholars. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor these principles, and in so doing protect the validity of University grades. This means that all academic work will be done by the student to whom it is assigned without unauthorized aid of any kind. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in the planning and supervision of academic work, so that honest effort will be positively encouraged. Compliance shall include compliance with the following specific rules:

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."

Section 223.01 defines plagiarism: "Any ideas or material taken from another source for either written or oral presentation must be fully acknowledged. Offering the work of someone else as one's own is plagiarism. 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. The offering of materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment also is considered plagiarism. Any student who fails to give credit in written or oral work for the ideas or materials that have been taken from another is guilty of plagiarism."

Section 223.02 defines the professor's responsibility in maintaining academic integrity: "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, he/she will notify the student and discuss the incident. After discussing the alleged act of academic dishonesty with the student, the instructor will make a decision. Depending on the instructor's judgment of the particular case, he/she 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 imposes such a failing grade for academic dishonesty, the Dean of Students, the Dean(s) of the Academic Division or Autonomous School in which the course is taught and in which the student is a major, if different, should be notified of the failing grade."

Section 223.04 states that some cases of academic dishonesty may be punished more seriously: "In instances of academic dishonesty where the instructor feels that more serious action than a failing grade in the course is warranted, the instructor will notify the appropriate Dean(s) of the Division or Autonomous School in which the course is taught and in which the student is a major, if different, and the Vice-President responsible for Student Services, or a designee, in writing of the circumstances. The appropriate academic Dean(s) may then refer the case to the University Judiciary which shall have original jurisdiction. You are also urged to ask the instructor about the appropriateness of any practice when in doubt."