

Language, cognition and social behaviour

Autumn 2017, The Swedish Program, Stockholm School of Economics

Location: Room A975

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Office hours: By appointment

Course description

Language is a fundamental tool in human processes, playing a key role in sharing and influencing reality, in the transmission of cultural knowledge, and in establishing and maintaining relationships. What people say to each other and the way they do it strongly influences the quality of their relationships and their psychological well-being. Humans are surrounded by language throughout the day – in face-to-face interaction but also via media from newspapers to online social media.

The aim of this course is to explore the intersection of language, cognition and social interaction. For example, we will be looking at how values, attitudes and personality are reflected in language and how cognitive biases may be revealed by unconscious word choice. We will also examine how language affects cognition and behaviour – for example, how questions in inquiries affect memory and witness testimonies, or how word choice in recruitment processes has an effect on who would be interested in a job as well as who would be considered best for the job. We will also cover some experimental research on the topic of voice and domination in conversations and how biological signals can affect the course of a conversation.

The course starts with an introduction to language in psychology: how language evolved in the human lineage and how it develops during the course of a child becoming an adult. The effects of bilingualism on cognition and how cultural aspects are reflected in language are also of special interest. Emphasis will be put on recent experimental research.

Course requirements and examinations

The course will be examined by two examination papers. The first paper is guided by a number of questions to answer. The final exam is a thorough examination of a language phenomenon that the student finds especially interesting. The paper includes a further literature review together with a detailed proposal on how the phenomenon could be studied further.

Grades are based upon your active attendance and participation in class, and on the two papers. The grading system is also based on a peer-review system, which includes reading and evaluating each other's presentations and papers. Feedback on presentations and writing skills will be given during the course.

For each seminar, each student will submit two questions related with the literature.

The final grade for the course is based on the following:

Active participation: 20% (in seminars and as a peer-reviewer)

Midterm paper: 30% (paper and presentation)

Final paper: 50% (paper and presentation)

Attendance and active participation

This course assumes an interactive approach that requires engaged participation from all members of the class. Students' presence is essential to the liveliness of the course, therefore regular attendance is considered mandatory. One absence is permitted, each subsequent absence will lower the overall participation grade by one step (A -> A-). The student should complete all readings by the date noted in the syllabus and come to class prepared to fully engage with the materials. Each seminar includes a

discussion of the papers that have been read before class. To make that discussion of high quality and worth your time, the students will bring one discussion question (in addition to the two questions related to readings that need to be submitted to the lecturer) that is submitted to the instructor before the seminar (24h in advance). For each seminar, a group of students will be assigned the roles as coordinators of the discussion.

Everybody should behave respectfully in the classroom. This includes, but is not limited to coming to class on time, giving speakers undivided attention, addressing classmates and the instructor with respect, and refraining from academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism).

Total time for each session is expected to be 3 hours including breaks.

Required readings

We will not follow any textbook. Instead, we will analyze relevant publications that review topics of our interest and recent studies. The readings for the first seminar are key-readings in that they provide an overall introduction to language and psychology. The readings are diverse, i.e. some articles review a topic, some present a single study. The readings will be uploaded on the webpage for the course.

Syllabus

This course consists of two types of in-class activities:

Thematic seminars. Reading course materials and preparation for discussion is required before the seminars. Each seminar is structured as follows:

- Introduction to the topic (instructor)
- Discussion based on pre-submitted questions related to the literature or the topics (the discussion is lead by student participants)

Students presentations (2 sessions). Students' work will be presented, discussed and graded twice during the course. Active participation is required.

Readings

1. Introduction: Language and psychology

~~August 29, Tuesday, 9.15-12.15~~ September 5, Tuesday, 13.00-16.00

– Fiedler, K. (2008). Language a toolbox for sharing and influencing social reality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 38-47.

– Krauss, R. M., & Chiu, C.-Y. (1997). *Language and social behavior*. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 41-88). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

2. Language evolution: Why did language evolve – cooperation, conflict or gossip?

September 6, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

– Dunbar, R. I. M. (1993). Co-evolution of neo-cortex, group size and language in humans. *Behavioral and brain sciences*, 16, 681-735.

– Krauss, R. M., & Chiu, C.-Y. (1997). *Language and social behavior*. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 41-88). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

3. Language in the brain, language development and bilingualism

September 13, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

– Kuhl, P. K., Tsao, F.-M., & Liu, H.-M. (2003). Foreign-language experience in infancy: Effects of short-term exposure and social interaction on phonetic learning. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 100, 9096-9101.

– Costa, A., & Sebastián-Gallés, N. (2014). How does the bilingual experience sculpt the brain? *Nature reviews. Neuroscience*, 15, 336-345.

4. Language and culture: The expression of emotion. Individual and collective identity, stereotypes

September 20, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

– Barrett, L. F., Lindquist, K. A., & Gendron, M. (2007). Language as context for the perception of emotion. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 11, 327-332.

– Ross, M., Xun, W. Q. E., & Wilson, A. E. (2002). Language and the bicultural self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1040-1050.

– Clark, A. E., & Kashima, Y. (2007). Stereotypes help people connect with others in the community: A situated functional analysis of the stereotype consistency bias in communication. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93, 1028-1039.

5. Communication: Gender. Communication of men and women

September 27, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

– Palomares, N. A. (2009). Women are sort of more tentative than men, aren't they? How men and women use tentative language differently, similarly, and counterstereotypically as a function of gender salience. *Communication Research*, 36, 538-560.

– Gustafsson Sendén, M., Sikström, S., & Lindholm, T. (2015). "She" and "He" in News Media Messages: Pronoun Use Reflects Gender Biases in Semantic Contexts. *Sex Roles*, 72, 40-49.

– Hancock, A. B., & Rubin, B. A. (2015). Influence of communication partner's gender on language. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 34(1), 46-64.

Submission of midterm papers by September 29, 23.59

6. Midterm presentations

October 4, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

Presentation of student papers

7. Methods in studying the psychology of language. Introduction to exam paper

October 11, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

– Fiedler, K. (2008). Language a toolbox for sharing and influencing social reality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 38-47.

– von Hippel, W., Sakaquaptewa, D., & Vargas, P. (1997). The linguistic intergroup bias as an implicit indicator of prejudice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 33, 490-509.

8. Facebook updates, language and personality

October 18, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

– Kosinski, M., Stillwell, D., & Graepel, T. (2013). Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behavior. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110, 5802-5805.

– Pennebaker, J. W., & Graybeal, A. (2001). Patterns of natural language use: Disclosure, personality, and social integration. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10, 90-93.

9. Language in social relations

October 25, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

- Ireland, M. E., Slatcher, R. B., Eastwick, P. W., Scissors, L. E., Finkel, E. J., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2011). Language style matching predicts relationship initiation and stability. *Psychological Science* 22, 39-44.
- Geschke, D., Sassenberg, K., Ruhrmann, G., & Sommer, D. (2010). Effects of linguistic abstractness in the mass media: How newspaper articles shape readers' attitudes toward migrants. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, 22, 99-104.

10. Persuasion and influence

November 15, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

- Song, H. Y., & Schwarz, N. (2010). If it's easy to read, it's easy to do, pretty, good, and true. *Psychologist*, 23, 108-111.
- Cialdini, R. B. (2003). Crafting normative messages to protect the environment. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12, 105-109.
- Wiener, H. J. D., & Chartrand, T. L. (2014). The effect of voice quality on ad efficacy. *Psychology and Marketing* 31(7). 509–517.

11. Dominance in conversations

November 22, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

- Grueneisen, S., & Tomasello, M. (2017). Children coordinate in a recurrent social dilemma by taking turns and along dominance asymmetries. *Developmental psychology*, 53(2), 265-273.
- Borkowska, B., & Pawlowski, B. (2011). Female voice frequency in the context of dominance and attractiveness perception. *Animal Behaviour* 82.1, 55–59.
- Manson, J. H., Gervais, M. M., Fessler, D. M., & Kline, M. A. (2014). Subclinical primary psychopathy, but not physical formidability or attractiveness, predicts conversational dominance in a zero-acquaintance situation. *PloS one*, 9(11), e113135.

Submission of final exam papers by November 26, 23.59

12. Final exams

November 29, Wednesday, 9.15-12.15

Presentation of student papers