

# Language, cognition and social behaviour

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Spring 2018; The Swedish Program; Stockholm School of Economics

**Location:** Room A975

**Instructor:** PhD. Marie Gustafsson Sendén

**Email:** mgu@psychology.su.se (easiest way to reach me)

**Office hours:** appointment

## Course description

Language is a fundamental tool in human social 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 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 in the media, such as newspapers, literature and on social medias on the internet.

The aim of this course is to explore the intersection of language, cognition and social interaction. For example, how values, attitudes and personality are reflected in language and how cognitive biases may be revealed by unconscious word choice. We 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 affects who would like to search for a job as well as whom is considered best for a job.

The course starts with an introduction to language in psychology. How language evolved in the human lineage and how it develops from being a child to an adult. The effects of bilingualism on cognition, and how cultural aspects are reflected in language are also of special interest. Thus, one part of the course is also to reflect on aspects of the Swedish language in comparison to students' native and spoken languages.

## 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 literature review together with a proposal on how the phenomenon could be studied further (i.e., a study should be designed).

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 presentation and writing skills will be given during the course.

For each seminar – the student shall 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 expected and 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 engage fully with the materials. Each seminar includes a discussion of the papers that has been read before class. To make that discussion of high quality, the student will bring one discussion question that is submitted to the instructor before the seminar (24 hours 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, taking credit for the work of others, etc.).

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

**Required readings**

We will not follow any textbook during this course. Instead, we will analyse relevant publications that review topics of our interest and present important 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, and other present a single study, but they are always related to the theme of the seminar. The selected articles will be distributed on the web-page for the course.

The articles are listed in the syllabus, but might be subject to change.

**Syllabus**

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The 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 led by student participants).

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

## Syllabus

### **1. Introduction: Language and psychology**

January 24, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

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?**

January 31, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

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**

February 7, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

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.

Commented [A1]: Ted talk

### **4. Language and culture: The expression of emotions.**

February 14, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

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

Commented [A2]: Emotions vieos ted talk

### **5. Communication: Common Ground. Communication accommodation Individual and collective identity**

February 21, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

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.

Echterhoff, G., Lang, S., Kramer, N., & Higgins, E. T. (2009). Audience-tuning effects on memory the role of audience status in sharing reality. *Social Psychology*, 40, 150-163

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

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## **Submission of midterm papers – February 24, 00.00**

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### **6. Midterm Presentations**

February 28, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

Presentation of student papers

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

March 7, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

- Fiedler, K. (2008). Language a toolbox for sharing and influencing social reality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 38-47.
- von Hippel, W., Sekaquaptewa, D., & Vargas, P. (1997). The linguistic intergroup bias as an implicit indicator of prejudice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 33, 490-509.
- Pennebaker, J. W., & Graybeal, A. (2001). Patterns of natural language use: Disclosure, personality, and social integration. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10, 90-93.

#### **8. Facebook updates, language and personality**

March 14, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

- 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.

#### **9. Language and gender - Stereotypes. Grammatical gender. Communication of women and men**

March 28, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

- 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.

#### **10. Language in social relations**

April 4, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

- 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.

#### **11. Persuasion and influence**

April 11, Tuesday, 09.00-12.00

- 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.

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**Submission of exam papers – April 24, 00.00**

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#### **12. Final exams**

May 2, Tuesday 09.00-12.00

Presentation of student papers

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