

# Language, cognition and social behaviour

Autumn 2018, The Swedish Program, Stockholm School of Economics

Location: Room A975

Instructor: Kätlin Aare, MA

E-mail: [katlin.aare@ling.su.se](mailto:katlin.aare@ling.su.se)

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 or voice characteristics 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 a critical review of two experimental research articles. The final paper is a thorough examination of a language phenomenon that the student finds especially interesting – in the form of a mock grant proposal. The paper includes a literature review together with a detailed proposal on how and why the phenomenon should be studied.

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 a question related with the literature to the course website. There, the topics under question should be discussed with other students to help clarify matters to each other.

### 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)

## Learning outcomes

After completing this course, the student will be familiar with key concepts, terminology and methods in cognitive linguistics and social behaviour. The student will understand and be able to discuss the physiological, psychological and sociological reasons behind (para)linguistic behaviour and notice the phenomena in their own social interactions. Thanks to focusing on recent experimental research as well as working on midterm and final projects, the student will gain basic knowledge of how to review and design an experimental approach to a social phenomenon in connection with linguistic performance.

## 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. Absence is permitted only in case of emergency or an important event. 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 questions related to readings that need to be submitted to the website) 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 texts will be uploaded to an online classroom folder.

## 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 and arising points of interest related to the literature, as well as own experiences and ideas (the discussion is led by student participants)

**Students presentations** (2 sessions). Students' midterm and final work will be presented, discussed and graded twice during the course. The midterm paper will be presented by each student, followed by a discussion. The final paper will be presented by each student as a mock grant proposal to a mock committee (the other students). Each grant proposal is assigned an opponent/reviewer (another student) whose task is to analyze the proposed project and present their opinion (in writing and orally). Active participation is required.

## Readings

### 1. Introduction: Language and psychology

August 28, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

- 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.
- Cohen-Cole, J. (2015). The politics of psycholinguistics. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 51(1), 54-77.

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

September 11, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

- Dunbar, R. I. M. (1993). Co-evolution of neo-cortex, group size and language in humans. *Behavioral and brain sciences*, 16, 681-735.
- Dediu, D., & Levinson, S. C. (2018). Neanderthal language revisited: not only us. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 21, 49-55.
- Levinson, S. C. (2014). Language evolution. In *The Cambridge handbook of linguistic anthropology* (pp. 309-324). Cambridge University Press.

### 3. Language in the brain, language development and bilingualism

September 18, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

- 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.
- Birdsong, D. (2018). Plasticity, Variability and Age in Second Language Acquisition and Bilingualism. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 81, 1-17.

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

September 25, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

- 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

October 2, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

- 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 Wednesday, October 3, 23.59

### 6. Midterm presentations

October 9, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

Presentation of student papers

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

October 16, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

– 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.

– Schwarz, N. (2014). *Cognition and communication: Judgmental biases, research methods, and the logic of conversation*. Psychology Press, 1-26.

### 8. Facebook updates, language and personality

October 23, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

– 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

November 13, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

– 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.

– Heblich, S., Lameli, A., & Riener, G. (2015). The effect of perceived regional accents on individual economic behavior: A lab experiment on linguistic performance, cognitive ratings and economic decisions. *PLoS one*, 10(2), e0113475.

### 10. Persuasion and influence

November 20, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

– 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.

– Hayakawa, S., Tannenbaum, D., Costa, A., Corey, J. D., & Keysar, B. (2017). Thinking more or feeling less? Explaining the foreign-language effect on moral judgment. *Psychological science*, 28(10), 1387-1397.

## **11. Dominance in conversations**

November 27, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

- 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 Wednesday, November 28, 23.59**

## **12. Final exams**

December 4, Tuesday, 8.30-11.30

Presentation of student papers