Language, cognition and social behaviour

Spring 2019

Location: To be announced
Instructor: Hellen Vergoossen
Email: hellenvergoossen@swedishprogram.org

Course description

We are surrounded by language every day; in face-to-face interaction, in newspapers, literature and on social media on the internet. 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 influences the quality of their relationships and their psychological well-being.

The aim of this course is to explore the intersection of language, cognition and social interaction. With the help of scientific literature and modern technologies such as EEG and eye-tracking, we will explore subjects such as how values, attitudes and personality are reflected in language, how cognitive biases may be revealed by word choice, how questions in inquiries affect memory and witness testimonies, and how word choice in recruitment processes affects who would like to apply for the job and who is considered the best candidate for the job.

The course starts with an introduction to language in psychology, and then move to subjects such as the evolution of human language, the development of language in children, and the effects of bilingualism on cognition. The interaction between culture and language will also be discussed, where students get to reflect on learning the Swedish language, and their experiences with communication in Sweden.

Course requirements and examinations

The final grade for the course is based on the following:
- Active participation: 20% (in seminars and as a peer reviewer)
- Midterm paper: 25% (paper and presentation)
- Final paper: 55% (paper and presentation)

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

For each discussion seminar, the student is to submit two questions related to the literature via Google Classroom. In addition to this, there will a weekly assignment for which instructions will be given through Google Classroom.

The course will be examined with two papers. The midterm 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 and a proposal for a study design that could be used to study the phenomenon further.

Attendance and active participation

This course takes 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 lecture on the papers' subject as an introduction to the discussion. In preparation for the discussion, the student will submit one discussion question through Google Classroom 24 hours before the seminar. For each seminar a group of students will be assigned the roles of moderators of the discussion.

Not turning in assignments in time, as well as not fulfilling the criteria for the midterm or the final paper will lead to the lowering of the final grade by one step (A → A-)

Everybody should behave respectfully in the classroom. This includes 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 a textbook during this course. Instead, we will read 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, but they are always related to the theme of the seminar, i.e., some articles review a topic, others present a single study, and some materials may be assigned in video or audio format. The selected materials will be distributed on the web-page for the course.

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

Syllabus

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).
- Lecture 2, 3, 4, 5, 7: Discussion based on pre-submitted questions related to the literature or the topics (the discussion is led by students)
- Lecture 8, 9, 10, 11: Activity based on pre-submitted assignment related to that week's literature or subject.

Student presentations (lecture 6 and 12). Students' work will be presented, discussed and graded. Active participation is required.

Lectures

1. ### Introduction: Language and psychology

   Tuesday January 22nd, 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. Lindsey (Eds.), Handbook of social psychology (Vol. 4, pp. 41-88). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

2. ### Language evolution: Why did language evolve - Cooperation, conflict or gossip?

   Tuesday January 29th, 09.00-12.00

   de Boer, B. (2017). Evolution of speech and evolution of language. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 24*(1), 158-162. doi:10.3758/s13423-016-1130-6
   Krauss, R. M., & Chiu, C.-Y. (1997). Language and social behavior. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske & G. Lindsey (Eds.), Handbook of social psychology (Vol. 4, pp. 41-88). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

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

   Tuesday February 5th, 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.

4. ### Communication: Common Ground. Communication accommodation

   Tuesday February 12th, 09.00-12.00

   Keysar, B., & Henly, A. S. (2002). Speakers' overestimation of their effectiveness. *Psychol Sci, 13*(3), 207-212. doi:10.1111/1467-9280.00439

Kushlev, K., & Samantha, J. H. (2017). Put the Phone Down: Testing a Complement-Interfere Model of Computer-Mediated Communication in the Context of Face-to-Face Interactions. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1948550617722199. doi:10.1177/1948550617722199

5. <u>Language and culture: Individual and collective identity</u>

Tuesday February 19th, 09.00-12.00

Davidoff, J. (2001). Language and perceptual categorisation. *Trends in cognitive sciences, 5,* 9, 382-387.

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

Submission of midterm papers – Date to be announced

6. <u>Midterm Presentations</u>

Tuesday February 26th, 09.00-12.00

Presentation of student papers.

7. <u>Language and emotions</u>

Tuesday March 5th, 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.

8. <u>Methods in studying the psychology of language - Introduction to exam paper</u>

Tuesday March 12th, 09.00-12.00

Location: Frescati Hagväg 14, Stockholm University (travel instructions will be published in the Classroom)

Visiting the eye-tracking lab at the Department of Psychology at Stockholm University.

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

Maass, A. (1999). Linguistic intergroup bias: Stereotype perpetuation through languages, Vol. 31. (pp. 79-121): Academic Press, San Diego, CA.

Rayner, K., White, S. J., Johnson, R. L. & Liversedge, S. P. (2006). Raeding Wrods With Jumbled Lettres. *Psychological Science, 17*(3), 192-193.

9. <u>Language and gender - Stereotypes. Grammatical gender. Communication of women and men</u>

Tuesday March 19th, 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.

Spring break March 25th – April 7th

10. Facebook updates, language and personality

Tuesday April 9th, 09.00-12.00

Boyd, R. L. & Pennebaker, J. W. (2017). Language-based personality: a new approach to personality in a digital world. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, 18*, 63-68.

Cohn, M. A., Mehl, M. R. & Pennebaker, J. W. (2004). Linguistic Markers of Psychological Change Surrounding September 11, 2001. *Psychological Science, 15*(10), 687-693.

11. Language in social relations

Tuesday April 16th, 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.

Hansen, K., Rakić, T., & Steffens, M. C. (2013). When Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Preventing Discrimination of Nonstandard Speakers. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33(1), 68-77. doi:10.1177/0261927X13499761

Submission of exam papers – Date to be announced

12. Final exams

Tuesday April 23rd, 09.00-12.00

Presentation of student papers.