

# LING 4160: Language & Cognition

LS 107 M,W / 1:25 PM –2:45 PM

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## I. Class Description

This course will explore different ways in which the language-cognition relationship has been approached. Among the questions to be dealt with are the following: is language a prerequisite for certain kinds of thought? Does language shape thought? What kinds of roles does language play in cognition? How do answers to these questions inform broader debates about the nature of mind and language?

We will start by considering the controversial Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the associated theses of “linguistic determinism” and “linguistic relativity,” followed by rival views that construe thought as largely independent from natural language, such as the “language of thought” hypothesis within the computational theory of mind. We will also review and evaluate more recent Whorfian proposals, which seek to avoid the main defects of the original view.

Next we will compare two broad traditions concerning the role of language in thought, namely the (purely) “communicative view” of language, according to which language is mostly a way of expressing independently formed thoughts (Locke, Grice and Fodor) and the “cognitive view” which postulates a more intimate relation between the mental and the linguistic. We will explore the implications of this debate for the topic of animal cognition and will also consider more recent proposals on the role of language in cognition, such as the “language-as-toolkit” or the “language as cognitive integrator” views. Last, we will also trace other historical debates, such as the controversy over “innate ideas” —from the 17th century onwards—and will discuss how contemporary debates in linguistics, philosophy and related disciplines, has influenced more recent incarnations of this dispute.

## II. Objectives

- At the end of the semester, the students will:
  - Become familiar with the variety of formulations to which the *Sapir-Whorf* hypothesis (SWH) is susceptible.
  - Be aware of the respective implications of the different versions of SWH for our views of language, the mind, and human nature.
  - Understand and evaluate, in terms of cogency and relevance, the arguments and evidence in favor and against the different versions of SWH.
  - Appreciate the differences between the *communicative* and *cognitive* views of the relation language between language and thought, as well as how they fit within broader views of the mind.
  - Be aware of the different hypotheses regarding the roles (as “scaffolding”, “toolkit”, “lens”, etc.) that language possession can have in the modulation or enhancement of cognition.

- Understand how contemporary linguistic theories have informed the traditional debate on *innateness* and the mind.
- Be aware of some of the main points of the debate in innate ideas throughout the history of philosophy (and especially the Modern era).
- Be able to appreciate the basic logic behind Poverty of Stimulus arguments for linguistic innateness, as well as the ongoing debate on its merits.

### III. Texts

There will be no textbook for this class. All required readings will be made available on Canvas.

## IV. Grading and Requirements

### a. Reading

Those enrolled in the course for credit are required to **read all of the required materials closely**, preferably more than once, *before* each class meeting.

Changes to the schedule will occasionally be made. In such event, a notification of the changes will be made in class or on the course website.

Optional readings are just that: optional. Read them if you are interested in the topic area or if you are having trouble understanding the primary reading.

### b. Essays

You will be required to submit **two short essays**, each 1100-200 words long, due on the dates indicated in the schedule. Each paper represents 18.75% of the total grade, for a total **37.5 %**.

Late assignments will be handled on a case-by-case basis. You will lose points for each class day by which the paper is late.

Essay topics will be distributed well in advance of the due dates.

### c. Exams

There will be three exams, each of which is worth 12.5% of the final grade, for a total **37.5%**

#### Dates of the exams:

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First Exam	10/4/17
Second Exam	11/13/17
Third Exam:	12/12/17
	(1:00 pm)

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#### d. Written Assignments

Students will be expected to produce **two written assignments** (700-800 words), each of which worth 7.5% of the final grade, for a total **15%** of the final grade. Their due dates will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.

#### e. Attendance and Participation

Attendance and active, regular participation in class discussion (each of which is worth 5% of the final grade, for a total of 10%) will improve both your grade and your learning experience.

#### f. Summary of Grade Components

Exams	37.5%
Essays	37.5%
Written assignments	15%
Attendance & Participation	10%
Total	100%

#### g. Grading Scale

95 – 100	A
90 – 94	A-
87 – 89	B+
83 – 86	B

80 – 82	B-
77 – 79	C+
73 – 76	C
70 – 72	C-

67 – 69	D+
63 – 66	D
60 – 62	D-
< 59	F

## V. Important dates

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Classes start:	Monday 8/21
Labor Day holiday	Monday 9/4
<b>1st assignment due:</b>	9/13
<b>1st exam:</b>	10/4
Fall break:	10/8 - 10/15
<b>1st essay due:</b>	10/25
<b>2nd exam:</b>	11/13
<b>2nd assignment due:</b>	11/22
Thanksgiving break:	11/23–11/26
Classes end:	Friday 12/7
<b>Third exam:</b>	<b>2/12/17</b>

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## VI. Additional Policies and Information

General Education This course meets the Humanities Exploration (HF) requirement. This course addresses the following Essential Learning Outcomes: Critical Thinking, Written Communication, Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning.

### a. Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. Those who cheat on an evaluation will receive a 0 grade on the evaluation in question. Any plagiarized papers will also receive a 0 grade with no opportunity to re-write, and the case will be reported to the University Administration for possible further sanction.

Students are responsible for knowing and understanding the University's policy on academic dishonesty. For information, refer to the [Student Code](#).

### b. Students with Disabilities

If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020. More information at <http://disability.utah.edu>.

## VII. Other Resources

Tutoring is available through the ASUU Tutoring Center in the Student Services Building, Room 330. Students may schedule a day, evening or weekend appointment. For more information call 581 5153 or

go to <http://www.sa.utah.edu/Tutoring>.

The Writing Center located at the Marriott Library. For guidance go to: <http://www.writingcenter.utah.edu>.

## VIII. Schedule

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### SCHEDULE OF READINGS

(Tentative, as of August 14, 2017)

Week	Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
1	(8/21-8/23)	Introduction to the class. Descartes: language as a bridge to the mind	<i>Descartes</i> : “Letter to Henry More, “Letter to the Marquis of Newcastle. Selections from <i>Discourse on Method</i> .
2	(8/28-8/30)	Linguistic Relativism and Determinism The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Whorf and Early Whorfianism	<i>Elbourne</i> : “Meaning and Thought (pp. 140-2) <i>Swoyer</i> : “How Does Language Affect Thought?” (pp. 1-15) <i>Whorf</i> : “Science and Linguistics” <i>Sapir</i> : “The Nature of Language” and “The Status of Linguistics as a Science” (extracts, p. 10-11 and 208 ff respectively from <i>Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality</i> )
3	(9/6)	Criticisms to Whorf and Early Whorfianism	<i>Pinker</i> : “Mentalese” (ch. 3 of <i>The Language Instinct</i> ) item <i>Swoyer</i> : “How Does Language Affect Thought?” (pp. 16-39)
4	(9/11-9/13)	The Computational Theory of Mind and the Language of Thought Hypothesis (LOTH)	<i>Pinker</i> : selections from <i>How the Mind Works</i> (pp. 64-69 and 77-93) <i>Thagard</i> : “Representation and Computation”, from <i>Mind, an Introduction to Cognitive Science</i> <i>Stainton</i> : “The Language of Thought”

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5	(9/18-9/20)	NeoWhorfianism: Differences with Early Whorfianism. Empirical issues.	<p><i>Boroditsky</i>: “Linguistic Relativity”, “Sex, Syntax and Semantics”.</p> <p><i>Levinson</i>: “Frames of reference and Molyneux’s question: cross linguistic evidence”</p> <p><i>Li &amp; Gleitman</i>: “Turning the tables: language and spatial reasoning”</p>
6	(9/25-9/27)	NeoWhorfianism: Conceptual Issues.	<p><i>Slobin</i>: “Thinking for Speaking”</p> <p><i>Reines and Prinz</i>: “Reviving Whorf”</p> <p><i>Bloom &amp; Keil</i>: “Thinking through Language”</p>
7	(10/21/4)	Review. <i>Exam 1</i> .	
8	(10/10-10/12)	FALL BREAK	
9	(10/16-10/18)	The Roles of Language in Cognition The Communicative View: Ideas and Modularity	<p><i>Carruthers &amp; Boucher</i>: “Opening up options”</p> <p><i>Locke</i>: “Of Words”</p> <p><i>Fodor</i>: <i>The Modularity of Mind</i> (Excerpts)</p>
10	(10/23-10/25)	The Communicative View: Grice and Speaker Meaning. The Cognitive View: Language and Cognitive Restructuring (Vygotsky)	<p><i>Grice</i>: “Meaning”</p> <p><i>McGinn</i>: “Grice’s theory of speaker meaning”</p> <p><i>Vygotsky</i>: <i>Thought and World</i> (excerpts)</p>
11	(10/30-11/1)	The Supracognitive View: Language as Toolbox (Clark) The Cognitive View: Language and Cognitive Restructuring (Dennett)	<p><i>Clark</i>: “Magic Words: How Language Augments Human Computation”</p> <p><i>Dennett</i>: “How to do other things with words”</p>

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12	(11/6-11/8)	The Cognitive View: Language as Integrator. Review.	<i>Carruthers</i> : “The Cognitive Functions of Language” <i>Spelke</i> : “What makes us smart? Core knowledge and natural language”
13	(11/13-11/15)	<i>Exam 2</i> Innateness: Empiricism and Rationalism	<i>Markie</i> : Rationalism vs. Empiricism (SEP article) <i>Descartes</i> : “Comments on a Certain Program”
14	(11/20-11/22)	Innateness: Notions Linguistic Nativism: Poverty of Stimulus (PoS) Arguments	<i>Samuels</i> “Nativism” <i>Boeckx</i> : “How the Mind Grows: From Meno to Noam” <i>Laurence &amp; Margolis</i> : “Poverty of Stimulus Arguments”
15	(11/27-11/29)	PoS Arguments: Criticisms and discussion Concept Nativism and Empiricism	<i>Scholz &amp; Pullum</i> “Irrational Nativist Exuberance” <i>Crain &amp; Pietroski</i> “Why Language Acquisition is a Snap” <i>Matthews</i> “The Case for Linguistic Nativism”
16	(12/4-12/6)	Concept Nativism and Empiricism Review	<i>Prinz</i> : “Empiricism Reconsidered” <i>Margolis &amp; Laurence</i> : section 3 from “Concepts” (SEP article)
Finals period	<b>5/3</b> (10:30 am)	Second exam	