

HUM 17200: LANGUAGE AND THE HUMAN

THOUGHT

Winter Term 202X

Time: TBA

Instructor: TBA
Email: TBA
Office: TBA
Office Hours: TBA

Writing Intern: TBA
Email: TBA

We acknowledge with respect the Myaamia, Illinois, and Potawatomi people on whose traditional, ancestral, and unceded land we work and whose historical relationships with that land continue to this day.

Are you the same person across different languages that you speak? Does language shape your thought, or vice versa? Is thought even possible without language? How do philosophers think of language? Do different languages shape the brain differently? Do animals use language (or something similar) to think and communicate? How does language acquisition in children change their capacity to think? Does learning languages make us smarter? What kind of thought does translation involve? Does body language “count” as language? Is math a language? The spring quarter part of the Language and the Human Core is dedicated to the theme of language and thought. We will explore this theme through readings from a wide range of fields, including philosophy, neuroscience, anthropology, linguistics, literature and animal cognition. These readings will help us address the questions above, while providing an overview of some of the most fascinating problems surrounding our notions of language today.

REQUIRED READINGS

All other readings are available in digital format on Canvas.

REQUIRED FILM SCREENING (TBA):

- ...
- ...

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend every session, to be on time, and to be present and participate. Reading assignments must be completed in advance of class and contribute to the discussion board with at least one comment. Failure to attend sessions will impact your grade. If you have an emergency and have to miss a session, please email me before class to let me know.

Class Format

We will meet twice a week for a live discussion, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Weekly reading and viewing assignments should be completed by that class time. There will be occasional asynchronous instructional materials. The discussions will not be recorded, so please plan your schedule accordingly.

Grade distribution

1) Engagement and Participation	35 %
2) Paper 1 (2-3 pages)	15 %
3) Paper 2 (4-5 pages)	20%
4) Paper 3 (5-6 pages)	30%
TOTAL.....	100%

Further Explanations of Course (and Grading) Components

Engagement--Overview:

- Plan to read and to read carefully. Plan to participate weekly in discussion boards on Canvas. Use the list of “Conversational Moves” (below) to help make this a good conversation. Over the quarter, use as many of the conversational moves as you can. I may ask you to reflect on your use of these and what you have learned from shaping the discussion in these ways. Plan to participate in the live discussions. Try to say something each time.
- Please be sure to stay in contact should anything interfere with your class participation. I will not know what is going on unless you tell me. So please make me aware of tech issues, illness, personal circumstances, etc. and we will try to find workarounds and ways to adapt to circumstances where that is needed.
- It may be that I may become ill during the quarter. In that event, I will do my best to find someone to cover any instruction I cannot complete myself.

Conversational Moves¹

- Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person has said.
- Ask a question or make a comment that encourages someone else to elaborate on something that person has said.
- Make a comment that underscores the link between two people’s contributions. Make this link explicit in your comment.
- Make a comment indicating that you found another person’s ideas interesting or useful. Be specific as to why this was the case.
- Contribute something that builds on or springs from what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person’s thoughts.

¹ From Brookfield & Preskill, 2005. *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. San Francisco Jossey-Bass.

- Make a summary observation that takes into account several people’s contributions and that touches on a reoccurring theme in the discussion.
- Ask a cause-and-effect question – for example, “Can you explain why you think it’s true that if these things are in place, such and such a thing will occur?”
- Find a way to express appreciation for what you have gained from the discussion. Try to be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better.
- Disagree with someone in a respectful and constructive way.

Writing Seminars

Your class will be divided into **X** groups, and your writing intern will hold three writing seminars throughout the quarter for each group. Participating in these seminars fulfills the requirements of HUMA 19100, which is a graduation requirement. Let me repeat: **ATTENDING THESE SEMINARS IS REQUIRED TO GRADUATE.**

The purpose of the seminars is to teach you the craft of academic writing, which we will do by workshopping the writing you do for your assignments in this class. Either by offering each other recommendations for revision of in-progress drafts or by analyzing already-completed assignments in-depth, you will learn principles of academic argumentation, organization, and style. These skills will serve you throughout your career as university students, as well as after you graduate. Your writing intern will work out the scheduling with you to ensure that each group is able to attend all three seminars.

Etiquette and Technology Policy

Let me begin by emphasizing that the general approach for this course is to foster intellectual nourishment, social connection, and personal accommodation across time zones, technological variability, and personal contexts. I will seek feedback from you and will remain flexible in order to adjust to what works and what doesn’t. I would invite you to prioritize supporting each other, seek simple solutions, share resources, and communicate clearly. I invite you to share your experiences and contact me with any concerns and questions anytime. Since this is all very much an experiment, we might make changes when needed.

Great discussion is characterized by deep respect and an environment in which all people have the freedom to agree and disagree, clarify and challenge, be heard and speak. The general expectations of conduct for the university, of course, apply to the remote learning as well; you may refer to these guidelines in the student handbook. Occasionally in this class we will discuss difficult topics related to race, gender, inequality, class, and oppression. Each of you comes into this class with a different perspective that can be shared to enhance our understanding of these issues. I ask that you enter these conversations with respect, curiosity, and cultural humility. You should be open to alternative perspectives and willing to revise beliefs that are based on misinformation. As a general rule, your ideas and experiences can always be shared during these conversations but please refrain from dismissing the experiences of others. Personal attacks of any kind will not be tolerated.

Deadlines

The due dates for all papers are listed below. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of them as well as of dates for presentations and writing workshops. I will allow an automatic 1-day extension for ONE essay, but ask you to please make your request before the deadline has passed. For each day that your assignment is overdue, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., A- becomes a B+). Please plan accordingly.

Accessibility and Accommodation

Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations. For more information, visit disabilities.uchicago.edu.

Mental Health and Wellness

Your success in this class and overall wellness at the University is important to me, and I recognize that the transition to college poses challenges to all students. Should you feel in need of mental health or wellness support, remember that you have in place here a network of people who are ready and willing to help. Your College Advisor, your Resident Heads and Resident Assistants, and the staff at Student Counseling are available to you should you need or want to talk. You can find a description of the services offered here: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/>.

Plagiarism

Your work needs to be your own. The Student Handbook statement on academic honesty is efficient in explicating the point:

It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another's statements or ideas as one's own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University's disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously. Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes "use" should be addressed to the instructor.

Cases of academic dishonesty are taken very seriously by the College and by me.

WEEK	TU/TH	TEXT/THEM/READING ASSIGNMENT	WORKSHOPS/SCREENINGS/ PAPERS
1	Mar. 30	Introduction: Language and thought Boroditsky, L. (2011). "How language shapes thought" Scientific American, February 2011.	

	Apr. 1	Ch 5 “Language, Thought and Culture” in: Laura M. Ahearn - <i>Living Language_ An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology</i> -Wiley-Blackwell (2016) Pullum, Geoffrey K. (1991). <i>The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax</i> (pp. 159-171). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. https://psuvanguard.com/deconstructing-the-great-eskimo-vocabulary-hoax/	
2	Apr. 6 Apr 8	Language and philosophy Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus</i> Graphic Guide to Wittgenstein Discussion continued	Essay Prompt 1 distributed
3	Apr. 13 Apr. 15	Philosophy Ctd. / Children’s language acquisition Donald Davidson, “Perils & Pleasures of Interpretation” (in Oxford Handbook) Steven Pinker, <i>Words and Rules</i> , excerpts	Draft of Paper 1 due on X
4	Apr. 20 Apr. 22	Bilingualism Costa and Nuria, “How does the bilingual experience sculpt the brain?” Mechelli, A., et al., <i>Neurolinguistics: structural plasticity in the bilingual brain</i> . <i>Nature</i> , 2004. 431(7010): p. 757. Video TBA Kousta, S.-T., Vinson, D. P., & Vigliocco, G. (2008). Investigating linguistic relativity through bilingualism: The case of grammatical gender. <i>Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition</i> , 34(4), 843–858. Poem by Rhina Espaillat Select literary excerpts	Writing Workshop
5	Apr. 27	Multilingualism Costa et al. “Your Morals Depend on Language” Keysar, B. et al. (2012). The foreign-language effect: Thinking in a foreign tongue reduces	Essay 1 due on X

	Apr. 29	<p>decision biases. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 23,661-668.</p> <p>Select literary excerpts</p> <p>Boroditsky, L. (2001). Does language shape thought?: Mandarin and English speakers' conceptions of time. <i>Cognitive Psychology</i>, 43, 1-22.</p> <p>Komska, "Why Curious George Did Not Speak: The Conspicuous Multilingualism of Margret and H. A. Rey"</p>	
6	<p>May 4</p> <p>May 6</p>	<p>Language study and thought: Second language acquisition</p> <p>"The Benefits of second language study", NEA article</p> <p>Katherine R. Rich, <i>Dreaming in Hindi</i> (2009), excerpts</p>	<p>Essay Prompt 2 distributed</p> <p>Draft of Paper 2 due on X</p>
7	<p>May 11</p> <p>May 13</p>	<p>Translation</p> <p>A.K. Ramanujan, "On translating a Tamil poem"</p> <p>Vinay Dharwadker, "A. K. Ramanujan's Theory and Practice of Translation", <i>Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice</i>. Eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. London: Routledge, 1999: 114 – 140.</p> <p>Practical translation exercise, tailored to students' languages as applicable</p>	<p>Writing Workshop</p> <p>Essay 2 due X</p>
8	<p>May 18</p> <p>May 20</p>	<p>Math as a language, Body Language</p> <p>Spelke, E. S., & Tsivkin, S. (2001). Language and number: A bilingual training study. <i>Cognition</i>, 78(1), 45–88.</p> <p>Wakefield, "Math as a second language"</p> <p>Amy Cuddy TedTalk ASL as body language?</p>	<p>Essay Prompt 3 distributed</p> <p>Draft of Paper 3 due on X</p>

9		Language and the Non-Human: Animal Cognition May 25 Pilley, Chaser: Unlocking the Genius of the Dog Who Knows a Thousand Words, excerpts May 27 Discussion continued	Writing Workshop Essay 3 due X
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