Psych/Ling 413  Psychology of Language
Course Syllabus for Spring 2010

Instructor:  Dr. Alison Morris  Class meeting:  W 4:10-6:40 pm
Office:  Room 490, Science I  I ED 2  0224
Phone:  294-7532  Office Hours:  Tues & Thurs
Email:  almorris@iastate.edu  1:10-2:30 p.m.

Course website:  on WebCT

This is an introductory course in psycholinguistics. Whereas linguistics is the study of language (including such topics as the structure of language and the history of language change) psycholinguistics is the study of the mental processes underlying language. Both linguistics and psycholinguistics are part of the broader field of cognitive science (along with philosophy, cognitive psychology, and computer science).

In this course we will examine several current questions regarding the nature of human language and discuss what is known about how humans speak, listen, read, comprehend, and converse. We will also discuss some of the ways in which language serves as a window into human thought. The course will consist of lectures, videos, discussions, and demonstrations designed to teach concepts and methods in psycholinguistics and to examine some controversial claims.

Psycholinguistics applies the scientific method to the study of language processing. It is a theory-based discipline; therefore, in this course we will examine theories of language processing in terms of the specific predictions they make. We will also discuss experiments designed to test these predictions. Many of the questions we will examine do not have definitive answers at this time, so the focus of the course will often be as much on the important questions and methods of psycholinguistics as on the as-yet tentative “answers”.

Required text:


Additional readings will be available on WebCT.

Course requirements:

Grades will be based on the results of weekly quizzes (35%), a class presentation (25%), a term paper (30%) and class participation (10%).

Quizzes. A short quiz (5-10 questions) will be given at the beginning of each class, starting on the third week. The quiz will cover material from the previous week, including any assigned reading. In your reading, focus on the broad issues, in particular any claims made and any evidence presented in favor of or against those claims. The
“review questions” at the end of each chapter of the text will also be helpful in focusing your reading. There are no make-ups for missed quizzes; however, you may drop your lowest three quiz grades.

**Term Paper.** The term paper assignment is designed to allow students to pursue a topic in more depth. The paper should be no more than 10 pages (typed - double spaced). The topic is open, but the paper must examine a current claim or theory in psycholinguistics and the sources used as evidence for or against the claim/theory must be empirical studies drawn from standard psycholinguistics or cognitive psychology journals. More details about the term paper assignment will be provided later in the semester.

**Presentation.** Each student will prepare a 15-20 minute class presentation based on the paper topic. All presentations will be given during the last three weeks of the course.

**Class participation.** A class participation grade will be assigned on the basis of attendance (you can’t participate if you don’t attend) and participation in discussions. Participation can often make a difference in the final grade if you are on the borderline between grades.

**Course policies.**
If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon. Please request that a Disability Resources staff member send a Student Academic Accommodation Request (SAAR) form verifying your disability and specifying the accommodations you will need. The Disability Resources office is located in the Student Services Building, Room 1076. Their phone number is 515-294-7220, TTY: 515-294-6635.

**Tentative schedule of topics and readings:**

**Week 1 – Jan 13**

**Introduction**

Ch. 1-3


**Week 2 – Jan 20**

**Language in Animals?**

Ch. 13 pp 379-392


**Week 3 – Jan 27**

**BEGIN WEEKLY QUIZZES**

**Perception of Language**

Ch. 4 pp. 68-90


**Week 4 – Feb 3**

Perception of Language, cont.

Ch. 4 pp. 91-101


**Week 5 – Feb 10**

**The Internal Lexicon**

Ch. 5


**Week 6 – Feb 17**

**Sentence Comprehension**

Ch. 6


Tentative schedule of topics and readings, continued:

Week 7 – Feb 24

Discourse Comprehension Ch. 7


Week 8 – Mar 3

Language Production Ch. 8


Conversation Ch. 9


Week 9 – Mar 10

Issues in Language Acquisition Ch. 12


Week 10 – Mar 17

SPRING BREAK!!!
Tentative schedule of topics and readings, continued:

Week 11 – Mar 24
PAPER TOPIC DUE
Bilingualism

Ch. 11 pp. 310-323


Week 12 – Mar 31

Language and Brain

Ch. 13 pp 354-379


Week 13 – Apr 7

Language and Thought

Ch. 14


Week 14 – Apr 14

Student presentations

Week 15 – Apr 21

Student presentations

Week 16 – Apr 28
TERM PAPERS DUE
Student presentations