LING 1010

Language and Mind
Prof. Jon Sprouse

01.23.19: Introduction
Scientific thought is a way of understanding the universe around us

It is a method for systematically asking and answering questions.
Go big or Go home

If you are going to study something, why not study the most complicated object we have encountered in the universe?
Go big or Go home

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Go big or Go home

If you are going to study something, why not study the most complicated object we have encountered in the universe?
The Mind
When we talk about the mind, what we really mean is a set of cognitive abilities. Have you ever really thought about all of the complex things that your mind can do?

- perception
- memory
- language
- consciousness
- free will
- emotions
- learning
- decision making
- logic
- knowledge
- dreams
- sensation
The human mind has given rise to incredible achievements
...including the idea of science itself!
Language
Language is just one of our abilities

Language is just one of many cognitive abilities made possible by our minds. So why do people like me think it is important to focus on this one ability?
We see history as a steady progression of human achievement

But have you ever thought about why it is that other “smart” species, like other higher primates, haven’t shown this type of progress?

They show the ability to learn to use tools, and even show some creativity with those tools, but in millions of years, they haven’t built anything like we have...
Language makes our accomplishments possible - it makes us human!

So if you are going to study one facet of the mind, why not language!
The mind is structured
The mind has structure

When people say that the mind has structure (or the mind is structured), what they mean is that each cognitive ability works in a very specific way.

This may seem like a boringly obvious thing to say, but really think about it for a minute. Why should it be the case that cognitive abilities each only work in one specific way? Why can’t they work in lots of different ways? Or any way that we want?

Structure is constraint, it is limitation. Our minds are the most impressive things in the universe (so far), but they only work a certain way.
The lines are parallel

Cafe Wall Optical Illusion

Do the horizontal bars look like they bend and are at an angle?
Look again, because they don’t bend. They are straight and in parallel rows.
The alternating target patterns, rows and colors all combine to trick your brain.

I can tell you that the lines are parallel, but no matter how hard you try, you can’t see them that way! That is because your visual system is structured!
The lines are parallel

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CAFE WALL OPTICAL ILLUSION

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I can tell you that the lines are parallel, but no matter how hard you try, you can’t see them that way! That is because your visual system is structured!
The two squares are the same shade

I can tell you that the two lettered squares are the same shade, but you can’t see them that way.

That is because your visual system is structured!
The two squares are the same shade

I can tell you that the two lettered squares are the same shade, but you can’t see them that way.

That is because your visual system is structured!
I can tell you that the circles are not spinning, but no matter what you do, some of them will look like they are spinning!
The circles are NOT spinning

I can tell you that the circles are not spinning, but no matter what you do, some of them will look like they are spinning!

You can see that the circles are stationary by focusing on one of them directly. It stops moving.
The circles are NOT spinning

I can tell you that the circles are not spinning, but no matter what you do, some of them will look like they are spinning!

You can see that the circles are stationary by focusing on one of them directly. It stops moving.

But when there are several of them, you can’t focus on all of them at once, so the ones you aren’t focusing on appear to move.

The movement happens because your visual system is structured!
We want to explore that structure

Structure is the very essence of the mind. We want to understand that structure, and in doing so, better understand our own minds.

1. **What is the structure** that we see in a given cognitive ability?

2. **How did that structure** get into our minds?
   
   How much of it is part of our genetic code, and how much is learned from experience?

3. **What are the consequences** of that structure for human life?
The Language Faculty
The Language Faculty is a way of referring to all of the cognitive abilities that give rise to language in humans. But more specifically, it is the set of abilities that allows us to convert from physical signals like sound (or visual signs) to thoughts!

During **comprehension**, the language faculty turns speech sounds (or signs in sign language) into complex meanings.

During **production**, the language faculty turns complex meanings into motor commands for the vocal tract (or hands in sign language).
Language is complicated, hence it takes up an entire major!

words
un · believ · able

meanings
\( \lambda x. \text{dog}(x)(\text{sparky}) \)

sound

meanings

meaning

speech sounds

sentences

S

John

bought

NP

a
car
Our goals in this class

1. What is the structure of the language faculty? In other words, how does each stage of converting from sound to meaning work?

2. How did these abilities get into our minds/brains? In other words, how do children actually acquire language?

3. How does a deeper understanding of what it means to know a language affect our beliefs about language (and the people that speak them)?
The structure of this course
Some advice about names

You can call me Jon.

As long as you promise to respect me as the professor of this course, I don’t mind informality.

But if using my first name makes you uncomfortable, feel free to use Prof. Sprouse or Dr. Sprouse. I don’t mind the formalities if it makes you more comfortable.

But for everybody else you meet or email:

Call professors Prof. [last name].

Many staff at UConn have PhDs, so call them Dr. [last name].

If they have (or prefer) a different title, they will tell you. But you can’t go wrong by starting high.

Do not start with Mr./Ms./Mrs. Mr. and Ms. may sound like a downgrade. And Mrs. focuses on (irrelevant) marriage status.
The two major principles

1. **My number top priority is to treat everyone fairly.**

   As an educator, I think my most important responsibility is to give everyone the same chance to learn (and therefore succeed) in this course.

   This means that I will treat everyone equally. Everybody will play by the same rules. I have spent quite a bit of time over the years thinking about lots of different scenarios, and trying my best to craft policies that will be fair to everyone.

   Note that this means I am very unlikely to grant exceptions to policies. If you want an exception, you will have to prove to me that the course policies are inherently unfair to you; otherwise, giving you an exception would be unfair to everyone else!

2. **You are all in charge of your own education.**

   In college, you are in charge of your education. I have attempted to craft the course policies to allow you to make decisions about how best to navigate your education. I will tell you the rules, and my expectations, and then you can figure out how best to meet them within your own life.
Most important: Read the syllabus

The syllabus, and all course materials, are available on HuskyCT.

I have placed all of the course policies in the syllabus. Today I will give you a quick overview of the course policies, but you should still read the syllabus. It has more detail. You should check the syllabus before asking a question about course policies. Most likely the answer is in there. It is literally the set of rules for the course.
The components of this course

The learning:

Lectures: The content of this course comes from lectures. I strongly suggest you attend! I will post the lecture slides online before class so that you can use them for note taking.

Discussion Sections: This is your chance to discuss the material in a small class setting. Your TA will also guide you through some exercises that will help give you a deeper understanding of the material.

The doing:

Exams (3) 90% See schedule online
Syllabus Quiz 10% Due 10/1 at 11:59pm
Extra Credit (3) +3% Advertised on a special website.
There is no textbook!

There is no textbook for this course. This course is unique to UConn.

The benefit of this is that you save some money, and we have the flexibility to cover the best topics!

The downside is that there is no reading that you can do outside of lecture. I strongly suggest attending lecture!

I have constructed the lecture notes in this course to eliminate the need for a textbook. They contain plenty of text in addition to pictures and diagrams. If you attend lecture, you should be able to re-read the lecture notes later in order to study for the exams.
The Syllabus Quiz

The first (and only) quiz in this course is the Syllabus Quiz. It is available on HuskyCT right now.

This quiz has 10 questions. Each question is worth 1 point. Since the quiz is worth 10% of your grade, each question is worth 1 point on your final grade.

This sounds scary, but it isn’t. This quiz is about the syllabus. **You can use the syllabus to answer the questions.** Yes, for this quiz, you can have the syllabus open on your computer as you do the quiz.

The reason for this quiz is straightforward. Everything you need to know about how this course works is in the syllabus. This quiz gives you an incentive to read it, so that you can navigate this course easily.

The quiz is due **October 1st at 11:59pm**. HuskyCT will take the quiz away after this time, so be sure to complete it before 11:59.
The Exams

There are 3 exams for this course. Each exam is worth 30% of your grade. They are important.

The content for the exams will come directly from lecture. There are no readings for this course, so it is important to attend lecture and to download the lecture notes.

The exams are not cumulative. Each exam will cover the material from one of the three units in this course (the Nature of Linguistic Knowledge, the Acquisition of Linguistic Knowledge, and the Consequences of Understanding Linguistic Knowledge).

The exams will be 30 questions long, multiple choice, with three answer choices. This means that you have 33% chance of guessing the correct answer. It also means that each question is worth 1% of your final grade. The exams are important.

The exams will be online, through HuskyCT. They will be available for one week, to accommodate all schedules. There will be no make-up exams.
The rhythms of this class

Everybody has lecture on Monday and Wednesday.

Some of you have discussion section on Thursday.

Some of you have discussion section on Friday.
Discussion Sections (extra credit!)

Technically, attendance in discussion sections is optional. But I strongly encourage attendance. This is your chance to have a small class experience.

To give you incentive to attend discussion sections, I will give you half a point (.5) extra credit on the next exam for each discussion section you attend and participate in.

1. To earn the extra credit, you must attend the complete discussion session (your TA will take attendance at the beginning and end of the class). No leaving early.

2. You must participate in the class. No listening to music, texting, surfing the web, etc. I know some people are shy, so I am not requiring you to talk. But you need to engage in the class.

3. The extra credit is only valid for the next exam. This makes sense. Because the exams are not cumulative, the content of the discussion sections is only relevant for the next exam.

4. The maximum score on each exam is 30 points. The extra credit can make-up for missed questions, but cannot be used to get a score above 30 (that would let the credit spread to future exams).

5. Your TA has the final word in any dispute about attendance.
Make-up assignments for missed discussion

I know that other academic events might get in the way of discussion. In those cases, you can complete a make-up assignment so that you can still earn the weekly extra credit.

The make-up assignment is due **the Sunday following the discussion, at 11:59pm**. It is available on HuskyCT.

The assignment will be roughly equivalent to writing a two page paper, though the details will vary from week to week. Yes, that will probably take you more than 50 minutes (the length of a discussion section). This is because self-guided assignments always take longer than having an expert teach you.

I would personally recommend attending discussion, but I offer this to make sure everybody has the same opportunity to earn extra credit, even if other academic activities get in the way.

You do **not** need to provide documentation to miss a discussion section. Since this is about extra credit, it is completely up to you. (But, again, I suggest attending. You paid for this time!)
You will have the opportunity to earn +3 points **added directly to your final grade** by **participating in research experiments** being conducted inside the Department of Linguistics here at UConn. **Your grade can go over 100!**

You will receive 1 point for every 1 hour that you participate. If an experiment is only 30 minutes, I will round it up to 1 hour (you’re welcome!). If an experiment is 3 hours, you will receive 3 points for participating in one experiment!

To sign up for extra credit experiments, please go to this website:

https://uconn-ling.sona-systems.com/

When you first go to this website, you need to click **Request an Account**, and create an account for yourself using your UConn email address. It will also ask you for your student ID number (peoplesoft number) and an emergency telephone number. Once you have an account, you can log in and browse for available experiments, schedule appointments, and allocate credit to this course using the system.

You must complete your extra credit experiments by **5pm on 12/08/17** (the last day of regular classes). Experiments won’t be available after that.
Extra credit experiments are unpredictable

Here is the tricky part about extra credit experiments. I do not know ahead of time when the experiments will be running. They happen whenever the researchers are ready to post them. So you will have to check often to find them.

What I can promise you is this: everybody who wants a chance at extra credit will get one. What this means in practice is that I will guarantee that there will be enough experimental appointment slots for everybody to earn the full 3 points if they want.

I can’t promise when those slots will be available, so you need to check relatively often (once a week or so). But there will be enough for everybody.

Please trust me on this. As the semester goes by, some of you may start to worry. Please trust me that I will make sure everybody has a chance. It is part of my principle of fairness (Principle #1 in this course). I will also make sure you get that chance well before the end of the semester. I will make sure you have around 3 weeks to complete the experiments before the end of the semester. That way you won’t be rushing to get them in before the deadline.
Absences

Here is a brief recap of how to deal with absences.

**Lectures:** I strongly encourage you to attend, but I won’t be keeping track. You’ve paid for my time. I will be here no matter what.

**Discussion Sections:** Technically, you can miss as many as you like. But if you do attend, you will earn extra credit toward the next exam. If you miss a section, you can complete the make-up assignment for the extra credit. There is no need for documentation.
Student Athletes

In order to be fair to all students, every student in this course is given the same flexibility. It is up to you to decide how to use that flexibility.

If you wish to use it in order to participate in athletics, that is your prerogative. If another student wishes to use it to attend a different type of event, that is their prerogative.

I have scheduled the exams in this course so that they should never conflict with an athletic event. It is possible that athletic events will conflict with your discussion sections from time to time; however, if this does happen, it should be rare. Yes, I know this means that on rare occasions you will have to choose between attending a discussion section or attending the athletic event. In those cases, you can choose to complete the make-up assignments.
Disabilities

I will work with you to accommodate disabilities. However, to do so, I need notification from the Center for Students with Disabilities.

Please contact the CSD within the first two weeks of the semester: http://www.csd.uconn.edu/

I cannot accept requests that do not come from the CSD.
Academic Honesty

Academic misconduct will not be tolerated in this class. Here is how the university defines academic misconduct:

Academic misconduct is dishonest or unethical academic behavior that includes, but is not limited, to misrepresenting mastery in an academic area (e.g., cheating), intentionally or knowingly failing to properly credit information, research or ideas to their rightful originators or representing such information, research or ideas as your own (e.g., plagiarism).

I will follow the university policies on this. Please see the student code: http://community.uconn.edu/the-student-code-appendix-a/

Dropping a class: In general, I will approve requests to drop a class. However, I will not approve a request to drop the class if it is an attempt to avoid the consequences of academic misconduct (e.g., avoid an F on your transcript).
When it comes time to convert your numeric grade to a letter grade, I will use the following rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>92.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>89.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>86.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>82.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>79.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>76.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>72.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>69.49</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>66.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>62.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59.49</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notice that I am **rounding grades up** at the letter boundary! Between this and the extra credit opportunities, I am trying to do everything I can to help you get a good grade. You’re welcome.
Check the room assignment for your discussion section!

I have listed all of the discussion section information in the syllabus. It is also available on the student admin system (peoplesoft).

Sometimes the registrar changes the locations of discussion sections during the first week of class. Please check the student admin system (peoplesoft) to verify the location of your discussion section.

If you are interested in potentially switching your discussion section, please come up to the front of the room at the end of class. If there is another student who wants to switch into your section, I will take your names and id numbers, and ask the registrar to make the switch. This rarely works out, but it is worth trying.
No discussion sections this week

There are **no discussion sections this week**! This weekend is labor day weekend, and I am a softy.

But **there is the syllabus quiz**. You can take this quiz online using HuskyCT. Please use the syllabus to answer the questions. (HuskyCT will grade the quiz as you do it.)

The Syllabus Quiz is due **May 6th at 11:59pm**. It is worth 10% of your final grade (each question is worth 1 point; you can have the syllabus open as you do it). But I recommend that you complete it sooner than that.