

Language, Mind and Brain

LELA10201 // 2012-2013 // Semester 1

Dr. Wendell Kimper
Course Outline

1 Contact

Lecturer

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Consultation Hours: Wednesdays & Thursdays 16:00–17:00

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2 Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide you with an introduction to the intersection between language and cognition. We'll explore what makes human language unique, and how it relates both to cognitive functions in the mind and to physical structures in the brain.

In this course, we also hope to introduce you to fundamental aspects of scientific thinking about language — by engaging with the course material, you will gain familiarity with the ways in which hypotheses are posed and tested, the kinds of evidence that are brought to bear on questions of language and cognition, and the good, bad, and ugly of reasoning and argumentation in support of competing theories.

3 Blackboard

Blackboard is the University's eLearning system. Please familiarise yourself with the Blackboard site for this course. Things you will find there include:

- ★ Handouts and lecture slides
- ★ Reading assignments
- ★ Quizzes on the readings

- ★ Forum for posting questions
- ★ Announcements
- ★ Bonus materials

Important: Please direct questions you have about the course material to the forum on Blackboard; this way, other students who might have the same question can benefit from the answer as well.

4 Assessment

Reading Assignments — 5%

You must complete weekly reading assignments, and demonstrate that you have completed them by taking a brief quiz on Blackboard. The quiz will be quite simple; if you have done the reading, you should not find it difficult. Quizzes must be completed *by 9pm on Monday evening* on weeks when there is a tutorial.

Feedback: Answers to the quiz questions will be made available as soon as the deadline for taking the quiz has passed. If you submit questions about the reading, these will be addressed in the tutorial discussion. (If there is not time to address all questions, responses will be posted on Blackboard.)

Tutorials — 10%

In addition to attending tutorials, you must actively participate in discussions. Your TA will keep track of your participation.

In order to help you prepare for these discussions, a series of questions will accompany each reading assignment. You are not obligated to hand in written responses to these questions, but should give them some thought.

Feedback: If you have concerns about your participation, please speak with your TA.

Exam — 80%

You will sit a one-hour multiple-choice exam. Even though the questions will be multiple-choice, some may require you to think critically and assess reasoning.

Raw scores on the exam will be converted to marks via a scaling process. This is not intended to produce any particular distribution of marks, but rather to ensure that the resulting marks correspond to School and University standards.

Feedback: Multiple-choice exams are scored by machine; University policy states that you should receive feedback within 15 working days. After the exam, the correct answers and the scaling criteria will be made available.

Practice Exam — 5%

During Week 12, a practice exam will be available for you to take on Blackboard; the purpose of this is to prepare you for the actual exam, and to give you a sense of where you stand with respect to the material. *Your score on this practice will not be counted*, but you must complete all the questions to receive credit.

Feedback: Correct answers will be made available immediately upon completion of the practice exam. You should use this feedback to guide how and what you study in preparation for the exam; I will be available to discuss any concerns you might have.

5 Schedule

Week 1: Language as an Instinct

Is language something we learn to do, like any other skill, or is it an instinct — something we do because we are innately programmed for it?

Week 2: Child Language Development

How do young children acquire language? What are the developmental stages they go through, and what can that tell us about our innate linguistic capabilities?

Week 3: Humans vs. Animals I

How do non-human animals communicate? What are the similarities and differences between human language and the naturally occurring communication systems of non-human animals?

Week 4: Humans vs. Animals II

What happens when we attempt to teach human language (or systems instantiating its unique properties) to non-human animals?

Week 5: Humans vs. Animals III

What are the broader cognitive differences between humans and non-human animals? Do non-human animals have thought, culture, or theory of mind, and how essential are these factors to language?

Week 6: (Reading Week)

No lecture.

Week 7: Language and Cognition

Does language shape the way we think and feel? How does our linguistic experience shape our perception of what we see and hear?

Week 8: Language is Separate

Can we separate language ability from overall cognitive capability? Is it possible to have impairment in one but not the other?

Week 9: Language is Not Separate

How does linguistic processing depend on, interact with, or even interfere with other cognitive processes? Can we “turn off” our language faculty?

Week 10: Language in Use

What goes on in our minds when we produce and listen to speech? Why are some kinds of speech errors so common? And why does drinking too much affect how you speak?

Week 11: Functional Localization

Is there a physical “language centre” in the brain? What parts of the brain are responsible for speech, and what happens when they’re damaged?

Week 12: Brain Imaging

How can we catch a glimpse of what our brains are doing when we speak and listen to speech? What can brain imaging techniques like ERP and fMRI tell us about language?