

# Language & Thought

Professor Stephen Flusberg

Monday/Thursday 10:30 AM - 12:10 PM

Humanities Building, Room 1039

In this class we will explore the complex interrelationships between language and thought. How does language offer a window into the human mind? Can subtle differences in the language we are exposed to affect how we make important decisions or remember events? Do people who speak different languages think about and even perceive the world differently? Are some thoughts unthinkable without language or are the effects of language on thought more benign? Through what mechanisms might language influence other cognitive processes? These are the sorts of questions we will tackle in this course through reading, discussing, and writing about the relevant scientific literature, as well as engaging in a variety of hands-on activities and experiments.

## Course Objectives

- Understand and evaluate the central questions & debates in the study of language and thought
- Understand and assess how researchers scientifically investigate the relationship between language and thought
- Develop the ability to critically engage with scientific and philosophical issues that have not yet been fully resolved
- Understand how the science of language and thought impacts our daily lives
- Gain practice reading, discussing, and critically appraising scientific research papers

### Instructor Contact Information

Dr. Stephen Flusberg  
stephen.flusberg@purchase.edu  
Office phone: 914.251.6650

### Office Hours

Mondays: 1:00 - 3:00 PM  
Wednesdays: 10:00 - 11:00 AM  
Nat Sci Building, Room 2045

### Learning Assistant Information

Nawaal Mohiuddin  
nawaal.mohiuddin@purchase.edu

### Office Hours

Tuesdays: 3:30 - 4:30 PM  
Humanities Building 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Lounge

No appointment is necessary to attend any office hours. If you contact us, we will do our best to get back to you within a 24-hour period, but we will not typically respond to emails after 9:00 PM.

## Course Overview

This is an advanced psychology course that will include reading, writing about, and discussing central texts, experiments, and theories on the relationship between language and thought in many different contexts. Coursework is centered on the following elements:

### 1. Participation & Attendance

Participation includes regular attendance and punctuality, participating in class discussions and exercises, and demonstrating an earnest engagement with assigned texts (this means thoughtful contributions to our discussions). Participation in class discussions and activities is a *must* in a course like this. Questions are a perfectly thoughtful form of contribution; no one is required to be brilliant all the time or to necessarily be "right." If speaking in class is challenging for you, you may compensate by coming to speak to me in office hours on a regular basis, emailing me with additional comments or questions, and putting extra effort into your writing.

Participation also includes following basic etiquette: All technologies are forbidden in the classroom. Turn them off. Lateness is disruptive, especially when you make a noisy entrance. Frequent trips to the bathroom and long sojourns in the bathroom or elsewhere are unacceptable. Eating elaborate meals in class is inappropriate. Sleeping in class is simply offensive. *Attendance in this course is MANDATORY.* If you miss more than 4 classes you will automatically receive an F. Being late will count as half an absence. If you know you have to miss a class, please let me know ahead of time (if possible) and be prepared to provide documentation for your absence.

### 2. Readings

For most class periods you will be responsible for reading one or two articles or book chapters. You must do all of the reading for this class, as it will be impossible to productively participate (or complete the response papers) without doing so. Some of these readings will be challenging, especially if you do not have much experience reading experimental research papers. That's OK! Reading scientific papers is a skill that can only be developed with practice and guidance, and that is one of the main objectives of this class. All of the readings will be available for download on the course Moodle in PDF format or hyperlinked text. You should take notes when you read, summarizing in your own words the arguments of the author(s). For an experimental article, I recommend using the "QMRI" approach to note-taking:

- Q:** What is the question that the researchers designed their experiment(s) to address?
- M:** What are the specific methods the researchers used in their study to address the primary research question? How does this method help get at the research question? Who were the participants, what was the task, how many conditions were there, etc.
- R:** What were the results of the experiment(s)? What sort of data did they look at (reaction time, survey data, choices, free response, coded responses, etc.)? What do these results mean in the context of this study?
- I:** What are the implications of the results of this study? What do the authors conclude about their original research question and hypothesis? What are the limitations of this study?

### **3. Response Papers (RPs)**

Just about every time there is a reading assignment there will also be a response paper assignment. These response papers should be submitted on Moodle by 10:00 AM on the days we have class. *You should put it in your calendar that you will be submitting response papers on Mondays and Thursdays all semester!* All responses will be submitted to Moodle using the online text box submission (i.e., you cannot upload a file with your response, though I recommend typing your response into a Word document first and saving it before pasting it into Moodle).

Each response assignment will include a question prompt that you must address in your writing, though you are welcome to submit additional original thoughts as well. Typically, 1-3 paragraphs will be sufficient for your response, and formal prose is not required (though it should be written in a clear manner so I can understand it); no need to write an essay! These will be graded on a 0-3 scale, where 3 is the best score and indicates a thoughtful, clear, and engaged response that addresses every aspect of the question prompt. There are 24 response papers due throughout the semester, and you may drop your lowest 4 scores (i.e., I will only count 19 towards your final grade)

### **4. Assignments & Activities**

Throughout the semester we will engage in a variety of individual and group activities, all of which will include a written component and some of which will include a presentation component as well. Details will be provided as we move through the course.

### **Grading Schema**

33.33% - Participation

33.33% - Response Papers

33.33% - Assignments & Activities

I use grades to indicate to you where you are thinking and creating productively and to encourage you to take your work further. Rather than use grades as a punishment or reward, I use them to help you adjust to the objectives of the course and enhance the particular kind of work you can do. I do not compare your work to the work of others, but against your own abilities, as I perceive them through past work. My goal is to help you find out what you can do best and to help you improve upon some of things at which you are less adept. If you receive a high grade, I am encouraging you to do more of the same. If you receive a low grade, I am indicating where you could improve. Never take a grade as a personal assessment of your character--not in this or any other class.

I do not determine your final grade by simply calculating the average of all your grades at the end of the semester (though that does play a role!). I assess you in relation to the broad arc of your work throughout the semester, taking into account your strong work and your efforts to improve

where needed. All of your work is valuable, so you should always take a stab at it and you should always share it. In-progress work is welcome. Below is a general schema for grade assessments:

**A** work means you have engaged the materials, discussions and exercises of the course in earnest and given your maximum or near-maximum contributions. This means you have read all assigned readings, you have punctually attended all class sessions, and you have engaged in thoughtful and creative exchanges with the rest of us, your peers.

**B** work means you have engaged the materials, discussions, and exercises of the course in earnest but you have not given your fullest attention to your work in this course. You have missed a couple of the readings or classes or a combination of readings and classes. Or you have given a few slapdash contributions in writing and/or discussion. Or you are frequently late to class. Or you have excelled in some areas, but only marginally improved in others.

**C** work means you have been mildly engaged with the course and have had absences, tardiness, and your written and verbal contributions have been uneven. You have also not demonstrated significant improvement where indicated.

**D** and **F** work indicates a generally unsatisfactory contribution to the course through uneven attendance, punctuality, and verbal and written contributions.

Grading in this course will adhere to the Purchase policy on cheating and plagiarism. This policy explicitly prohibits cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another person and the representation of them as one's own original work. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the definition of plagiarism and the acceptable methods of attribution. Plagiarism will earn you an immediate F in the course. Please refer to the college website for information on this policy: <http://www.purchase.edu/policies/plagiarism.asp>.

### **Academic Accommodations**

Students with documented physical, learning, psychological and other disabilities are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations. If you need classroom or testing accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Resources ([ODR@purchase.edu](mailto:ODR@purchase.edu); Student Services Building, Room 317A; 914-251-6035) or the Counseling Center ([cou.counseling.center@purchase.edu](mailto:cou.counseling.center@purchase.edu); Humanities Building, basement; 914-251-6390). I encourage students with disabilities to let me know as soon as possible during the semester what, if any, special accommodations will be needed. After-the-fact accommodations will not be possible.

## Course Schedule

The most up-to-date schedule of topics and assignments will always be posted on the Moodle calendar, as this schedule might change a bit as we move through the semester. All changes will be reflected on the calendar and important communications will be sent via Moodle announcements (which are permanently archived on Moodle so that you can access past messages at any moment).

		DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	NOTES
Week 1	M	28-Aug	Introduction		
	Th	31-Aug	Language 101	Hayakawa 1991: Ch 1 & 2	
Week 2	M	4-Sep	<b>LABOR DAY - NO CLASS</b>		
	Th	7-Sep	Language 102	Traxler 2012: Chapter 1 <i>Optional: Yong 2016</i>	
Week 3	M	11-Sep	Language as a Mirror	Chung & Pennebaker 2007	<b>Assignment #1</b> due
	Th	14-Sep	TBD	<i>online language talks</i>	
Week 4	M	18-Sep	Language as a Window I	Hayakawa 1991: Chapter 8 Wittgenstein PI: 65-78	
	Th	21-Sep	Language as a Window II	Lakoff & Johnson 1980 Chapters 1-4	
Week 5	M	25-Sep	Language as a Frame I	Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011	
	Th	28-Sep	Language as Frame II	<i>Optional Reading: Fausey &amp; Boroditsky 2010</i>	
Week 6	M	2-Oct	Language as a Lens I	Whorf 1939	<b>Assignment #2</b> due 10/3
	Th	5-Oct	Language as a Lens II	Pinker 1994 Chapter 3	
Week 7	M	9-Oct	Language as a Spotlight	Slobin 2003	
	Th	12-Oct	Language as a Tool	Gentner 2003	
Week 8	M	16-Oct	Categories	Lupyan et al. 2007	
	Th	19-Oct	Colors	Winawer et al 2007	

Week 9	M	23-Oct	Smells	Majid & Burenhult 2014	
	Th	26-Oct	Odor Lexicon Presentations	<i>No Reading</i>	<b>Assignment #3</b> due 10/27
Week 10	M	30-Oct	Space	Laundau et al. 2010	
	Th	2-Nov	Time	Boroditsky 2000 <i>Optional: Boroditsky 2011</i>	
Week 11	M	6-Nov	Politics	Matlock 2012 Thibodeau & Flusberg 2017	
	Th	9-Nov	Numbers	Frank et al. 2008	
Week 12	M	13-Nov	Theory of Mind	de Villiers & de Villiers 2014	<b>Assignment #4</b> due 11/14
	Th	16-Nov	Emotion	Lindquist et al., 2015	11/15 = Last day to withdraw
Week 13	M	20-Nov	Mental Health	Pennebaker & Seagal 1999	
	Th	23-Nov	<b>THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS</b>		
Week 14	M	27-Nov	Consciousness	Jaynes 1976: Ch 1 & 2	
	Th	30-Nov	Gender	Gaucher et al., 2011	<b>Assignment #5</b> due
Week 15	M	4-Dec	Taboo Language	Pinker 2007 & Jay 2009	
	Th	7-Dec	Where do We Stand?	<i>Optional Readings: Foer 2012 &amp; Chiang: Story of Your Life</i>	
Week 16	M	11-Dec	<b>NO CLASS</b> - Assignment #6 Due Monday, 12/14 @ 5:00 PM		

### **NSS Fall 2017 Lecture Series**

This fall the School of Natural and Social Sciences has a wonderful lineup of speakers. I strongly recommend you attend these talks, which always take place on Tuesdays @ 7:00 PM in NS1001

#### **Tuesday, September 19th @ 7:00 PM**

Leigh Patel, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Lynch School of Education, Boston College

*Learning and Liberation: Making Ourselves Anew*

#### **Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup> @ 7:00 PM**

Timothy LaRocca, Ph.D. (Purchase Biology '03 alumnus)

Assistant Professor, Basic and Clinical Sciences,

Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences

*Hyperglycemia Potentiates a Cell Death Shift that Exacerbates Neonatal Stroke Injury*

#### **Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup> @ 7:00 PM**

Anthony Lemieux, Ph.D.

Professor of Global Studies and Communication, Georgia State University

*Collaborating across Disciplines to Understand Terrorism and Violence*