

Thoughtbending: an Exploration in Designing Cognition and Linguistic Relativity (Linguistics 198)

University of California Berkeley

Spring 2023



Basic Info

Facilitator:

George Flint

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Class meets:

Wednesdays 5-6p - Starts Feb 8

McCone 141

Course description:

Can language learned in development (or thereafter) influence, limit, define, or even determine our cognition? Is our ability to reason—that one difference understood between us and other animals—guided by the linguistic systems at our minds' disposal? This course is an exploration of linguistic relativity, debate therein, prerequisites for understanding thereof, adjacent, and relevant topics. We will examine topics with case examples (individual languages) and ideas posited by various thinkers in modern cognitive linguistics and throughout the history of philosophy. No experience/prior knowledge necessary. Lecture/Discussion format.

SIGN UP

Modules

*Schedule is rough, general, and subject to change. Only some ideas/topics for each class are mentioned.

1 - Introduction to Linguistic Relativity

Feb 1 Class 1 - *Intro, some real-time cases and experiments*

2 - Cognitive Linguistic Mechanics

Feb 8 Class 2 - *Prototype Theory*

Feb 15 Class 3 - *Semantic Frame Theory*

Feb 22 Class 4 - *Category Part 1: Grammatical Gender & Cognitive Models*

Mar 1 Class 5 - *Category Part 2: Part 2 - Radials, Features, & Stereotypes*

Mar 8 Class 7 - *Metaphor and Metonymy*

3 - Linguistic Relativity Topics, Implications, Philosophy

Mar 15 Class 8 - *Spatial & Temporal Cognition*

Mar 22 Class 9 - *Math*

Apr 5 Class 10 - *Poetry*

Apr 12 Class 11 - *Constructed Languages*

Assignments & Grading

Assignments:

- 3 papers—lots of creative and philosophical freedom; prompts will be suggestions (assigned outside of midterm/final season generally)
- Note pages—one page (of any size) of notes of any structure and style for each reading assigned

Grading policy:

25% - HW (note pages)

- ✓ if completed before discussion of reading
- X if not completed
- Up to 3 Xs dropped for ✓s if completed by end of semester

45% - Papers (each 15%)

- Each worth 10 pts
- 2 pts for original thesis
- 1 pt for references made
- 3 pts for analysis/interpretation of references
- 3 pts for clarity/structure of ideas and writing
- 1 pt for citing correctly

30% - Attendance/participation

- It's on honor system—if you are taking the class it should be to feed your intellectual curiosity. No problem if you can't make it to class as long as you email me beforehand.
- ✓ for attendance if there
- X for attendance if not there and no email sent
- If participation generally makes you nervous let me know on the day 1 survey and participation will not count for or against you.
- ✓ for participation if you participate
- X for attendance if not there and no email sent

Flexibility & Inclusion

Accommodations and general flexibility:

This class is meant to be a resource and community for your intellectual curiosity. You must earn your credits by doing the assignments and coming to class, but if there is anything impeding your ability to do these things as you normally might, we can always work it out.

DSP info:

Students who have DSP accommodations will be accommodated accordingly. Please indicate your membership to the program in the day 1 survey.

Learning Objectives

Proficiency and knowledge in cognitive linguistics:

Students should leave class able to discuss issues and topics in historical and modern cognitive linguistics to a reasonable degree—if you were at dinner with friends or family who have no experience in or knowledge of the field, you should be able to stimulate their intellectual curiosity with down-to-earth articulation of complex and exciting topics.

Field curiosity:

The primary objective of the class is to foster curiosity. Bringing new topics to class or discussing them outside of it is sought after as an indicator of curiosity, not a requirement. If the field is not your thing, that's okay! If it is, I hope this class can be a good launchpad for you.

Creative philosophizing:

Students should develop and/or improve upon their creative philosophizing skills and practice concept creation as an art in intellectual space provided by the class. Students will demonstrate this skill in at least one of their papers.

Analytical philosophizing:

Students should also develop and/or improve upon their analytical philosophizing skills and practice the analysis, interpretation, and rearticulation of concepts created by other thinkers. Students will demonstrate this skill in at least one of their papers.

Course Materials

Readings from:

- Steven Pinker - *The Language Instinct*
- George Lakoff - *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*
- Charles J. Fillmore - *Frame Semantics*

If you think you might need to join DSP, contact their office:

260 César E. Chávez Student Center

510-642-0518

<https://dsp.berkeley.edu/>