

Exploring Language

01:615:101

Modality	Online, fully asynchronous
Course website	canvas.rutgers.edu (please make sure to allow Canvas to send notifications to your email)

Instructor	Justin Bland
Email	justin.bland@rutgers.edu
Office hours:	Thursday 3:00–4:00 PM on Zoom (see Canvas for link)

Course overview and learning goals

Course overview

This course is an invitation to explore language from multiple perspectives. We will work together to discover what it means to know a language; how we acquire and use our native language; how and why different languages vary; what different languages share in common; what it means to study language scientifically; and how these scientific results can shed light on some common misconceptions about languages and their speakers.

Questions that we will consider include:

- What is a language: a set of utterances, a set of sentences, or a set of cognitive abilities? And what does knowledge of a language consist of?
- Are some varieties of English better than others, or are all varieties equally valid? Where did standard English come from, and how does it differ from non-standard varieties?
- How do children acquire language? Does our knowledge of language derive entirely from experience? Or do humans come “hardwired” with certain innate capacities for language?
- How does the human mind comprehend and produce sentences? Where is our knowledge of language physically realized in the brain?
- Are human languages fundamentally different from other systems of animal communication?
- How do our everyday views about languages and their speakers relate to scientific observations about our language abilities and use?

Department learning goals

Students will reason about language, identify how incorrect or irrational assumptions and prejudices distort understanding of language, demonstrate knowledge about language in the world including a sophisticated understanding of linguistic and cultural variation, and evaluate popular views on the nature of human languages and their speakers.

Core Curriculum learning goal

This course has been approved as a Core Curriculum Course and satisfies the following Core Curriculum learning goal:

- Understand the nature of human languages and their speakers. [AHq]

Visit <http://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/academics/requirements/core> for information on the Core Curriculum.



Course materials

The following book is required:

Jackendoff, Ray. 1994. *Patterns in the mind*. New York: Basic Books. (ISBN 978-0786724055).

All other instructional materials, including supplementary readings, lecture videos, and additional resources, may be accessed via the course website.

Course requirements

Attendance and engagement

Because all work will be completed online and asynchronously (that is, on your own time), there is no formal attendance policy. Regular class engagement will be assessed through your online activity and discussion participation.

To be successful in this course, you should expect to spend roughly the same amount of time with the instructional materials, activities, and assignments as you would in a traditional in-person course, that is, about 8 hours per work. Be sure that you are visiting the course website at least two times per week, including those weeks with minimal course activity. (During most weeks, you will probably access the course website many times.) If a situation arises that may cause you to miss an extended period of time, please contact me immediately.

Weekly activities

Each week's lesson will consist of a mixture of videos, readings, and short activities. You will need to complete these activities to get credit, but they will only be graded for completion (meaning if you answer the questions, you will get credit). These short activities will account for 15% of your final grade.

Weekly homework

Each week will end with one larger homework assignment, which will take the form of a quiz, a short essay response, or a discussion. These homework assignments will be used to review or discuss topics we have covered that week.

Quizzes and short essays should be completed on your own, in your own words, and without assistance from another student or an outside source. At the end of the semester, you will have an opportunity to re-attempt one of your previous quizzes.

Discussions will be used to either discuss topics from the week's lessons or to collaboratively solve language analysis problems. Your discussion posts should reveal thoughtful sustained engagement with our instructional materials and your classmates' contributions.

These weekly homework assignments will account for 85% of your final grade.

Course policies

Academic integrity

You are expected to abide by the university's Academic Integrity Policy (nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu). If you have not yet reviewed this policy, then you should do so now. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and its commonly accepted standards, ignorance of these standards does not suffice to establish lack of intent. If you are unsure of any aspect of this policy, please ask!

I encourage you to discuss the course material with each other. However, each student must complete their written work independently. In particular, you are required to:

- avoid working on quizzes together
- avoid discussing quiz questions/answers before the quiz is due
- use your own words when writing your discussion posts and short essay questions
- cite your sources, including any classmates whose thoughts have informed yours
- avoid facilitating academic dishonesty by allowing another student to submit your own work

Collaboration on quizzes, plagiarism in any form (including from online sources and AI chatbots), presenting someone else's work as your own, and fabrication of information or citations all constitute violations of the university's Academic Integrity Policy and will not be tolerated.

Late work

If you have any circumstances that will affect your ability to turn in work on time, please contact me ahead of time so that we can arrange an extension. Without a pre-approved extension, I cannot accept late work. Please check the Canvas site regularly for required work and submission deadlines.

Discussion etiquette

The following are my expectations for how we will communicate in our class discussions:

- While there is no need to compose your discussion contributions as if you were writing a formal research paper, please try to express yourself clearly and professionally. Please also refrain from using all CAPITAL LETTERS.
- If you make any point that was already made by someone else, whether a reading, an online source, or a classmate, you should cite your sources. For course readings, list the title and page numbers. For online sources, include a link.
- Let's maintain a supportive learning community where everyone feels safe and people can cordially disagree. (Remember that sarcasm doesn't always come across online!) Treat your fellow students and your instructor with respect at all times and in all communications.

Above all, please remember to be respectful and considerate. You might also consider first composing your contributions in a word processor, where you can save and lightly edit your work before posting it to the class discussion.

Instructor communication

If you have any questions or need help with anything, please feel free to send me a message via Canvas or an email (justin.bland@rutgers.edu). I will reply to emails within **24 hours** during weekdays. Emails sent over the weekend or a holiday may not receive a reply until the following Monday, but I will try my best to communicate promptly. Weekly classwide announcements will be sent out via the Canvas site. Please make sure your Canvas settings are set to allow notifications to your email, and please check your email regularly for announcements. I will also regularly follow, and occasionally post to, the class discussions.

Technical support

For help with Canvas, please contact the Office of Information Technology (OIT) at <https://it.rutgers.edu/new-brunswick/oit-help-desk-at-rutgers-new-brunswick/>.

Disability Services

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <http://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS website (<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/getting-registered>).

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners. Call (848) 932-7884 or visit rhscaps.rutgers.edu.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. For more information, visit <https://vpva.rutgers.edu/>.

Grading

Your overall course grade will be assigned according to the following scale:

Letter grades

A	90–100%
B+	85–89%
B	80–84%
C+	75–79%
C	70–74%
D	60–69%
F	below 60%

Course schedule

This course schedule is tentative and may be subject to change as we move through the semester, but it should give you an idea of what to expect in this course. Actual assignments and deadlines will be provided on Canvas as we move through the semester.

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings	Assignments
1	Sep. 5–10	Introduction: Course overview, logistics, and requirements	–	Introductory discussion post
2	Sep. 11–17	What is language? What do you know when you know a language?	Jackendoff 1994, Ch. 1–3	Discussion 1
3	Sep. 18–24	Language varieties; prescriptivism and descriptivism	Simon 1980; <i>Lang. Myths</i> 8, 12; Pullum 1999	Quiz 1
4	Sep. 25–Oct. 1	What makes human language unique? Human vs. animal communication	Anderson 2004, Ch. 2 & 10; “The Honey Bee Dance Language”	Quiz 2
5	Oct. 2–8	Knowledge of speech sounds & patterns: Phonetics & phonology	Jackendoff 1994, Ch. 4–5	Discussion 2
6	Oct. 9–15	Knowledge of sentence patterns: Syntax	Jackendoff 1994, Ch. 6, Fromkin 2001	Quiz 3
7	Oct. 16–22	Nature vs. nurture in language development	Chomsky 1988 excerpts	Discussion 3
8	Oct. 23–29	How is language represented in the mind?	Baker 2001, Ch. 1–3	Quiz 4
9	Oct. 30–Nov. 5	Milestones in children’s language development	Jackendoff 1994, Ch. 8; Eimas 1985	Discussion 4
10	Nov. 6–12	Language development	Jackendoff 1994, Ch. 9; Lenhoff et al. 1997	Quiz 5
11	Nov. 13–19	Language comprehension and production: Garden paths and slips of the tongue	Whitney 1994, Ch. 7 (203–222); Fromkin 1973	Discussion 5
12	Nov. 20–26	Language comprehension and production (continued)		Short essay response 1
13	Nov. 27–Dec. 3	Neural substrates of language	Jackendoff 1994, Ch. 11	Discussion 6
15	Dec. 4–8	Pidgins and creole languages	Hickock et al. 2001, Sacks 2005, Bickerton 1983	Quiz 6
16	Dec. 9–13	Course wrap-up		

Readings list

- Anderson, Stephen R. 2004. *Doctor Dolittle's Delusion: Animals and the Uniqueness of Human Language*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Baker, Mark C. 2001. *The Atoms of Language*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bauer, Laurie, and Peter Trudgill. 1998. *Language Myths*. London: Penguin.
- Bickerton, Derek. 1983. Creole languages. *Scientific American*, 249(8): 116–122.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1988. *Language and Politics*. (Carlos P. Otero, ed.) Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Eimas, Peter D. 1985. The perception of speech in early infancy. *Scientific American*, 252(1): 46–52.
- Fromkin, Victoria A. 1973. Slips of the tongue. *Scientific American*, 229(6): 110–117.
- Fromkin, Victoria A. 2001. Linguistics: The scientific study of human language. In *Linguistics: An Introduction to Linguistic Theory*, pp. 3–21. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hickok, Gregory, Ursula Bellugi, and Edward S. Klima. 2001. Sign language in the brain. *Scientific American*, 284(6): 58–65.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1994. *Patterns in the Mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lenhoff, Howard M., Paul P. Wang, Frank Greenberg, and Ursula Bellugi. 1997. Williams Syndrome and the brain. *Scientific American*, 277(6): 68–73.
- Pullum, Geoffrey K. 1999. African American Vernacular English is not Standard English with mistakes. In R. Wheeler (ed.), *The Workings of Language*, pp. 39–58. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Sacks, Oliver. 2005, Oct. 31. Recalled to life. *The New Yorker*.
- Simon, John. 1980. The corruption of English. In L. Michaels and C. Ricks (eds.), *The State of the Language*, 35–42. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Whitney, Paul. 1998. *The Psychology of Language*¹. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.