

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

SPHR 1071W

**Instructor:** *F. Subiaul*  
**Course Room:** MON 351  
**ClassTime:** T/R 1110-1225

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**Office Hours:** T, W, R 10-11am

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**Required Texts:** *Introduction to Language* (ITL) 10<sup>th</sup> Edition

**Course Description.** Language is a uniquely human attribute. Yet, communication is common in the animal kingdom. What makes language a special type of communication? How does language develop? How do people communicate in everyday settings? What happens when language breaks down? These are some of the questions that will be explored in lectures, class discussion and outside activities. Specifically, this course will introduce students to the fundamental principles of language and communication including its evolution, biological underpinnings and sociological functions. Lectures will explore all modes of communication (acoustic, visual, tactile, olfactory) but will have a special focus on human speech as well as the characteristics of language structure and use.

**Course Outcomes.** At the end of this course studies you will: (1) know the various definitions and theories of verbal and non-verbal communication, (2) understand the various modalities of communication (e.g., auditory, visual, tactile) and their biological and neurobiological underpinnings, (3) analyze the features of language (phonology, syntax, pragmatics, etc.), (4) summarize and critique a scientific question pertaining to human language and communication. In addition to satisfying the WID requirement, this course also satisfies the G-PAC requirements of the George Washington University for *critical thinking* and *cross-cultural perspectives* through assignments and tests that will help students: (5) analyze and evaluate complex information, (6) understand and analyze scholarly literature and argument, (7) formulate a logical argument based on that analysis, (8) use cross-cultural comparison for understanding and (9) identify and analyze how socio-cultural variables affect human experience.

Learning the content of this course will require that students demonstrate knowledge and comprehension (approximately 20% of assessments), ability to apply material (40%), as well as analyze, evaluate, and synthesize/construct information (40%).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR WID STUDENTS:

**Quizzes (200 points). 30 MINUTES** (before lecture). FOUR quizzes each worth 50 points. Quizzes will be administered at the beginning of a given lecture. All quizzes will involve problem-solving where you will have to apply the information provided in class and in readings to answer hypothesis-driven questions.

**Critical Thinking Assignments or CTA (200 points). ONE PAGE** (150 words). Students will read FOUR empirical papers (marked with an asterisk (e.g., \*PDF) from selected PDF readings in Blackboard) and complete the following: (a) identify a hypothesis being tested, (b) generate a null hypothesis, (c) identify three results from the study, (d) do results reject the

null hypothesis? Is it consistent with the predictions of the hypothesis? Each CTA is worth 100 points. Follow template and example below.

**Review Papers (500 points). 10 PAGES.** Students will write TWO brief papers. Prior to submitting the final paper, students will first submit an outline and a rough draft for feedback and guidance (25 points/each). Students will base each paper on one of the critical thinking assignments described above. The paper should have the following sections: (1) Introduction, (2) Methods & Procedures, (3) Results & Discussion and (4) Conclusion (200 points/each). See the sample outline and draft below.

**TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENTS (ONE page) <sup>+</sup>:**

1. *Take Home 1: Critical Thinking (50 Points). Analyze and evaluate complex information. Identify rules governing derivational and inflectional morphology in Zulu using linguistic data.*
2. *Take Home 2: Cross-cultural perspective (50 Points). Compare and contrast the different rearing environments of the infants in the movie “Babies” and its impact (if any) on their language development.*

<sup>+</sup>Additional details for each Take Home are provided below.

**\*\*\* ALL assignment (except in-class quizzes) must be typed, printed and turned in class to the instructor on the date specified in the column “ASSIGNMENTS.” I DO NOT accepted emailed assignment. Handwritten work will NOT be graded. Late assignments (including extra credit) will not be accepted without a note from a nurse, doctor or dean. NO EXCEPTIONS. \*\*\***

**TIME REQUIREMENTS**

The amount of time that you are likely to spend on this course will vary from week to week, depending on your familiarity with the topic and type of assignments. Nonetheless, the average minimum amount of out-of-class or independent learning is expected should range from 2 to 6 hours per week plus the time spent in-class (1.5 hours).

**GRADING SCALE:**

A 1000 – 940	B 869 – 840	C 769 – 740	D 669 – 640
A- 939-900	B- 839 – 800	C- 739 – 700	D- 639 – 600
B+ 899-870	C+ 799 – 770	D+ 699 - 670	F < 600

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

DATE	LECTURE TITLE	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS
30-Aug	Introduction	Syllabus	

01-Sep	What is Language?	ITL, Ch. 1, PDF: *deHevia & Spelke, In-Class: Writing CTAs	<i>Practice CTA</i>
06-Sep	Brain & Language I	ITL, Ch. 10, *PDF: Martin et al	<i>Extra Credit CTA</i>
08-Sep	Brain & Language II	*PDF: Posner et al, PDF: Gazzaniga et al	<b>CTA 1</b>
13-Sep	Words of Language	ITL, Ch. 2 (pg. 35-43)	
15-Sep	Quiz 1	Practice CTA-writing, Review & Quiz	<b>Quiz 1</b>
20-Sep	Wordsmithing	ITL, Ch. 2 (pg. 43-66), PDF: Pinker (pg. 279-96)	<b>Outline 1</b>
22-Sep	Grammar & Syntax	ITL, Ch. 3	<i>Take Home 1</i>
27-Sep	Phonetics	ITL, Ch. 5	
29-Sep	Phonology	ITL, Ch. 6	<b>Draft 1</b>
04-Oct	Early Language Development	ITL, Ch. 9 (pg. 394-408), PDF: Marcus et al	
06-Oct	Late Language Development	ITL, Ch. 9 (pg. 408-424), *PDF Waxman et al	
11-Oct	<i>Universals in Language Development</i>	<i>Movie: Babies</i>	<b>CTA 2</b>
13-Oct	Semantics: The Meaning of Language	ITL, Ch. 4 (pg. 139-163)	<i>Take Home 2, Quiz 2</i>
18-Oct	Mind, Language, Human Nature	PDF: Pinker (pg. 1-24)	<b>Paper 1</b>
20-Oct	"Bad Words"	PDF: Pinker (pg. 323-369), PDF: Sherman & Clore	
<b>25-Oct</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	<b>FALL BREAK</b>	
27-Oct	Pragmatics	ITL, Ch. 4 (pg. 167-174), PDF: *Noveck & Reboul	<b>Outline 2</b>
01-Nov	Communication Disorders	PDF: Peña & Davis	
03-Nov	Dialects & Language Change	ITL, Ch. 7, 8	

08-Nov	Literacy	ITL, Ch. 12	<b>Quiz 3</b>
10-Nov	Sign Language	ITL, pgs. 60, 117, 215 *PDF: McSweeney et al.	<b>CTA 3</b>
15-Nov	Non-Verbal Communication	PDF: Rowe & Goldin-Meadow	<b>Draft 2</b>
17-Nov	Animal Communication	PDF: Cheney & Seyfarth (pg. 217-247)	
22-Nov	<i>Ape Language Projects</i>	*Movie: <i>Project Nim</i>	<b>CTA 4</b> (due 11/29)
<b>24-Nov</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	<b>THANKSGIVING</b>	
29-Nov	Linguistic Precursors	PDF: Cheney & Seyfarth (pg. 248-272)	
01-Dec	Theories of Speech & Language 1	PDF: Hauser (pg. 30-70), Terrace (1979)	
06-Dec	Discussion	Discuss Project Nim and major themes in the course.	<b>Paper 2, Quiz 4</b>

### TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENTS: ONLY 1 PAGE.

**Take Home 1: Critical Thinking Assignment.** *Analyze and evaluate complex information. Phonological Analysis.* Identify rules governing derivational and inflectional morphology in Zulu using linguistic data. Your task is to answer all the components of Exercise 5 in Chapter 2.

**Take Home 2: Cross-Cultural Perspective Assignment.** *Identify and analyze the impact of diverse experiences and/or cultures upon human behavior, thought, and expression.*

Babies Movie Analysis. Address the following questions:

1. Who are the four different babies in the movie? Where are they from? Describe the environment in which they are growing up?
2. Identify TWO similarities developmental milestones (e.g., motor, emotional, social, communicative)
3. Identify differences in the same TWO developmental milestones.
4. General conclusions.

### CRITICAL THINKING ASSIGNMENT (CTA):

**ONLY one page and no more than 150 words.** The key here is to learn how to translate complex information into clear, concise, and factually-specific statements.

CTAs have 3 parts: Hypotheses, Evidence, Conclusion. *Hypotheses* should make clear, concise and specific predictions. They should, generally, have the following structure: X causes/correlates/results in Y. X and Y should be something narrow in scope and clear to most educated people. Big, broad open-ended topics make for poor hypotheses. The relationship between X and Y (i.e., the hypothesis) should be easy to falsify or reject if untrue. *Evidence* should be facts discovered through empirical/scientific research. Evidence should not be confused with expert opinion. Opinions represent an analysis (i.e., potentially an alternative hypothesis) or belief about the evidence reported. *Conclusion* should summarize the evidence in one sentence and clearly state whether the evidence supports the hypothesis and the null. Below are some examples.

### **Sample / Template 1:**

- (a) Hypothesis: Language comprehension (hearing) and language production (speech) are located in different parts of the brain.
- (b) Null: Language comprehension (hearing) and language production (speech) are located in the same parts of the brain.
- (c) Evidence: (1) fMRI shows that speech production activates Broca's Area in frontal lobes and (2) speech perception (hearing) activates Wernicke's Area in the posterior temporal lobes. Research on brain damages patients show that (3) damage to Broca's area affects speech production but not general language comprehension. (4) Damage to Wernicke's Area in the temporal lobe affect language comprehension but not speech fluency.
- (d) Conclusion: Given the evidence from fMRI and brain damaged patients showing that Broca's area is associated with language production and Wernicke's Area with language comprehension, we can reject the null and accept the hypothesis that speech production and language comprehension are localized to different areas of the brain.

### **Sample / Template 2:**

- (a) Hypothesis: Reading atypical stylized fonts (italicized, bolded) leads to better learning than reading typical non-stylized fonts (non italicized, bolded).
- (b) Null: Reading typical non-stylized fonts (non italicized, bolded) leads to better learning than reading atypical stylized fonts (italicized, bolded).
- (c) Evidence: Research shows that participants (1) have better recall after reading atypical than typical fonts, (2) studied passages longer when fonts were small than when they were larger and (3) answered more questions correctly (improved comprehension) when reading a passage in atypical stylized fonts than in typical non-stylized fonts.
- (d) Conclusion: Together, results show that reading stylized (small, italicized and/or bolded) fonts has a direct impact on learning, improving recall and language

comprehension. These results are consistent with the hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

**Email:** All assignments (including extra credit) must be typed and handed in class. I DO NOT accept emailed assignments. It is your responsibility to type all assignments and hand them to me in person, have a classmate hand it to me, or place it in my mailbox before or immediately after class.

**Late work:** Loss of 1/3 grade point (e.g., A -> A-), for every calendar day late. Exceptions granted for documented medical or family emergencies, and religious holidays (with prior notification). Late extra credit assignments are generally not accepted without a note from a doctor or dean.

**Make-up quizzes and assignments:** Permitted only in case of documented medical or family emergencies.

**Religious holidays:** Absence for class and late submission of assignments permitted with at least one week's notice.

**Attendance:** Attendance is *NOT* required, and actually *discouraged in the event that the student has symptoms of the flu*. In the case of an absence students should make sure to keep up with the readings, lectures, and assignments by consulting the Blackboard course website, and e-mailing other students for notes or the instructor for additional information.

NOTE: For university policies on teaching, see <http://www.gwu.edu/~academic/Teaching/main.htm>.

## **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

It is the University's policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in class activities and assignments. Students with disabilities should contact Disability Support Services (994-8250) to obtain assistance with arranging the necessary accommodations and must notify the instructor of the course by first week of class if accommodations are required. No special accommodations are possible without DSS approval.

## **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is defined as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner and is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The George Washington University. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Penalties for academic dishonesty are outlined in the *Code of Academic Integrity*

([www2.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html](http://www2.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html)) and may lead to disciplinary sanctions including a failing grade for the course.

### **To Report an Emergency or Suspicious Activity**

Call the University Police Department at 202-994-6111 (Foggy Bottom) or 202-242-6111 (Mount Vernon). If the line is unavailable or you are calling from another University location, dial 911.

### **Shelter in Place – General Guidance**

Although it is unlikely that we will ever need to shelter in place, it is helpful to know what to do just in case. No matter where you are on campus, the basic steps of shelter in place will generally remain the same:

- If you are inside, stay where you are unless the building you are in is affected. If it is affected, you should evacuate. If you are outdoors, proceed into the closest GW building or follow instructions from emergency personnel on scene.
- Shelter-in-place in an interior room, above ground level, and with the fewest windows. If sheltering in a room with windows, keep away from the windows. If there is a large group of people inside a particular building, several rooms maybe necessary.
- Shut and lock all windows (locking will form a tighter seal) and close exterior doors.
- Turn off air conditioners, heaters, and fans. Close vents to ventilation systems as you are able. (Facilities staff will turn off ventilation systems as quickly as possible).
- Make a list of the people with you and call the list in to UPD so they know where you are sheltering.
- Visit GW Campus Advisories for incident updates <http://campusadvisories.gwu.edu> or call the GW Information Line 202-994-5050. If possible, turn on a radio or television and listen for further instructions. If your e-mail address or mobile device is registered with Alert DC, check for alert notifications.
- Make yourself comfortable and look after one other. You will get word as soon as it is safe to come out.

### **Evacuation**

An evacuation will be considered if the building we are in is affected or we must move to a location of greater safety. We will always evacuate if the fire alarm sounds. In the event of an evacuation, please gather your personal belongings quickly (purse, keys, cell phone, GWorld card, etc.) and proceed to the nearest exit. **(INSERT TWO WAYS OUT OF THE BUILDING HERE)**. Do not use the elevator.

Once we have evacuated the building, proceed to our primary rendezvous location **(INSERT PRIMARY INDOOR RENDEZVOUS LOCATION HERE)**. In the event that this location is unavailable, we will meet at **(INSERT SECONDARY INDOOR RENDEZVOUS LOCATION HERE)**.

### **Alert DC**

Alert DC provides free notification by e-mail or text message during an emergency. Visit GW Campus Advisories for a link and instructions on how to sign up for alerts pertaining to GW. If you receive an Alert DC notification during class, please share the information immediately.

### **GW Alert**

GW Alert provides popup notification to desktop and laptop computers during an emergency. In the event that we receive an alert to the computer in our classroom, we will follow the instructions given. You are also encouraged to download this application to your personal computer. Visit GW Campus Advisories to learn how.

### **Additional Information**

Additional information about emergency preparedness and response at GW as well as the University's operating status can be found on GW Campus Advisories <http://campusadvisories.gwu.edu> or by calling the GW Information Line at 202-994-5050.