

# COM 370: Psychology of Language

Fall 2025— TR 9:35-10:50, Fell 125

School of Communication--Illinois State University--John R. Baldwin

Updated: 08/05/2025

A brain is worth little without a tongue. – <i>French proverb</i>	
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<b>Office Hours:</b> MW 2-3; TR 2-4 or by appointment	<b>Office Phone:</b> 309-438-7110
<b>Topics, Events, Extra Credit (See Canvas)</b>	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:jrbaldw@ilstu.edu">jrbaldw@ilstu.edu</a>

**Course Texts:** There is no textbook. *Locate all readings in the “Lessons” pages for each day of class on Canvas modules*, with the *reference for the reading provided at the top of that day’s lesson*. I will update notes as the semester goes along!

## Catalog Description

Theories and empirical research relating to the development and function of language, including how the brain works during conversation, aspects of language gain and loss, and the nature of conversation and its relation to group and social contexts. Prerequisites: COM 111 and 297.

## Course Goals and Approach

Many subjects in communication offer clearly applicable skills and ideas that can be transported easily to the workplace or to everyday life. But communication in the classroom, workplace, or romantic encounter cannot occur without the deep structures of information processing and the links between cognition and language, as well as the structure of interaction. Ellis (1999) says *all* communication has at its base face-to-face interaction. So, if we have a good understanding of these structures of f2f communication, we will also better understand mediated communication, texting, social media, and other forms of “interaction.”

This course offers an understanding of spoken communication. As an upper-level course, its objective is to introduce you to theory and research traditions regarding language and communication, beginning from the processing of the brain and working outward to the nature of interaction within social contexts. Even though class content is sometimes theoretical, you can gain information that will help you to be a better producer and consumer of messages, either face-to-face or mediated, in any context.

Major topics include language as a system, the production and decoding of language, and the interactive nature between language and social and cultural systems. You will learn how the human brain receives and produces language, how children learn—and adults lose—language, how language leads to coherent conversations, how language shapes social and personal relationships, how language characterizes certain groups (e.g., sex/gender, ethnic, age), and how world languages are different and similar.

After this course, you should be able to:

- Outline the main components of language systems and describe how they relate to each other
- Describe the functioning of the brain as it relates to language perception and production
- Summarize how meaning is structured and coordinated in interaction
- Explain basic rules and processes of several types of interaction (e.g., chit-chat, narratives in interaction, descriptions, apologies, face-threatening situations)
- Conduct a basic analysis of everyday interaction in terms of class theories and concepts
- Make practical applications of several class concepts to the everyday production and consumption of face-to-face and mediated messages
- Analyze the relationship between group belonging (e.g., culture, sex/gender) and language

## Course Grade

You will earn your grade through the following assignments:

Assignment	Due Date	Possible	Earned
Participation (forums)/Tickets to Enter		30	___/30
Artifacts (best 4 scores) & Abstract			___/90
• Artifact 1	09/12/25	30	___/30
• Artifact 2	09/26/25	30	___/30
• Artifact 3	10/31/25	30	___/30
• Artifact 4/make-up assignment	11/14/25	30	___
Exams			___/100
• Exam 1: Midterm	10/10/25		___/50
• Exam 2: Final	Day of final (f2f)		___/50
Research Paper:		100	___/100
Transcripts	09/19/25		
Final paper	11/21/25		
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>320</b>

Course Grade: 90% = A; 80% = B; 70% = C; 60% = D; under 60% = F

## Description of Assignments

- ❖ **Participation (30 pts):** Being present every day is important, but you must also participate, bring ideas to class, and reflect that you have processed relevant readings. Participation this semester will be based largely on *tickets to enter (TTE)*, in which you present or write a brief note demonstrating that you have done and thought about the class reading, and brief application exercises. The *best* TTEs reflect clearly that you have read *and thought about* the material. In rank of grading, “participation” points awarded for a TTE might be as follows: +0: tells me something you could get from the title of the reading; +1: provides a def or idea that looks like you memorized it from the reading; +2: provides idea or thought in your own words that reflects that you read the material. Final grade is subjective, based on overall TTE and in-class participation for the semester.
- ❖ **Artifacts (90 points—best 3 of 4):** An *artifact* is an example of a class concept that occurs in everyday life—such as an interaction you describe, an online video, or a set of comics—*plus* your analysis of the “artifact” in terms of *specific* class concepts (with citation of any relevant readings). I will provide artifact prompts for artifacts, based on what we have covered during the period of class since the last artifact was due. The artifact should be a **3-4 page** (double-spaced) essay that includes the following (in some order):
  - A description of the “artifact” (event, advertisement, conversation, website, etc.). There should be a **specific** relationship, discussion, text, etc. that you are applying concepts to.
  - Brief description, *with relevant reference(s) and definitions* of concepts covered in class. **Cite and use class readings throughout the semester. Provide APA references for any class paper.**
  - A clear application that connects the concept to the artifact (e.g., provide an example of how the artifact illustrates the concept). The application should make *explicit* references to class concepts, providing citation where appropriate.
- ❖ **Exams:** There will be two exams to evaluate your understanding of concepts covered in class and readings. These may combine multiple choice with open-ended responses.
- ❖ **Analysis of a Conversation (CA/DA) Paper (100 pts):** You will record, transcribe, and analyze a *naturally occurring* conversation (not an interview, unless you want to study the interview process) between at least two people using aspects of conversation or discourse analysis. You should choose

someone you know well, because your familiarity with the participants will give you more to talk about in your paper. You will:

- record a 20- to 30-minute conversation to find the *best text segment* for analysis
- choose and transcribe from that a *roughly 3-minute* section for analysis. The transcript must use “conversation analysis” notation, with line numbers, even if you do not do “CA” in your analysis.
- provide an analysis of the transcript using 3 main areas of ideas from the class. The analysis is roughly 4-5 pp. double-spaced (not counting transcript)
- cite relevant sources, and provide a reference list at the end of the paper
- **Graduate students will instead do a “conference ready” paper** (e.g., 20-30 sources minimum, 20-25 pp. of double-spaced text); primary research or “critical review of literature”) on some element related to language within a given context. The paper may be sole- or group-authored.

**Extra Credit:** You may take part in research through the School of Communication Research Announcement Board (<https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies>) for extra-credit (3 pts for each ½ hour of study, max 15 pts). Keep a screen shot of last page of each study you complete. You may also propose other extra-credit opportunities, such as watching an online debate or a documentary (many are available on Kanopy!) on some aspect related to class content and writing a brief report.

### **Important Notes:**

1. **Due dates:** All assignments are due in class on day required, in format described on Canvas. LATE work may receive a penalty of up to 10% for each class day late. If lateness is habitual for a given student, stiffer penalties are possible.
2. **Format:** All assignments should be typed and double-spaced, according to American Psychological Association (APA) style manual, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., **unless otherwise noted**. Margins should be 1 inch on all sides. No folders, binders, or plastic covers, please. Please turn in any digital documents in **Word-compatible** attachment, not a PDF or link to a document on a drive. For “hard-copy” documents, also please turn in digital copy on Canvas.
3. **Identification:** Please use **UID only** on in-class and take-home essays, rather than your name. Please label any digital files (file names) with your UID and assignment name, to assist grading.
4. **Late work.** If you need to make up exams or get deadline extensions on projects, you must discuss make-up opportunities with the instructor **in advance** of the missed class period or due date. Turning in multiple late assignments, even with extenuating circumstances, will work against your grade and future student benefits, such as letters of recommendation.
5. **Non-completion of work:** The failure to take any *exam* or to complete the *term project* will result in an automatic grade of “F” for that item. If a test or presentation is missed, it is the student’s responsibility to make arrangements with the instructor.
6. **Records:** Always keep careful records of your progress: attendance, returned papers, etc. until you receive (and are in agreement with!) final grade for course. This is especially true for group assignments. It is your responsibility to keep track of your academic progress.
7. **Plagiarism:** Any form of cheating, including plagiarized papers, will result in a minimum penalty of “F” in the assignment. In some cases, a further sanction may be enforced. **Note that plagiarism includes** (a) use of others’ ideas or organization without citation; (b) use of other students’ work or your own from other classes without citation; (c) use of words *even with citation*, but without quotation marks to separate the authors’ words from your own. The same principle applies to any paper deemed to have AI content. You will receive one warning; after that, **use of AI or plagiarism will result in an automatic zero for the assignment and possible reporting to the academic ethics committee.**
8. **Changes to syllabus:** The instructor reserves all rights to make changes to this syllabus. However, any changes regarding due dates of assignments or dates of tests will be carried out only by class consensus. In effect, the syllabus is our “contract.” If there are updates to schedule, I will post your e-mail account with notification.

### ***Useful contacts:***

- Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 308 Fell Hall, Office Phone (309) 438-5853, Video Phone (309) 319-7682 or visit the website at [StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu](http://StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu)
- Student Counseling Services: 438-3655
- **Redbirds Keep Thriving:** A website to help with anxiety, isolation, grief, financial difficulties, physical health (especially in the time of COVID)
- Julia Visor Learning Center/Univ College: 438-7100 <https://universitycollege.illinoisstate.edu/help/>

## **CDM 370: Psychology of Language**

**Updated 08/05/25**

**NOTE:** This is a *tentative* syllabus! I am always looking for new readings, so we may have a *limited number* of new readings (readings I might replace are highlighted). I will make reading announcements in class and on an on-line announcements page. **All readings are on Canvas**

Wk	
1 Aug 19-21	<b>Introduction to course</b> <b>UNIT 1: Language and the Brain</b> T: Intro to the Course: <b>What is the nature of language?</b> Basic elements of language; roles in communication; Ellis, Ch. 1 (last section only: 10 points about language) R: Ellis 1 (the rest) and introduction to language terms (aspects of language)
2 Aug 26-28	T: Clark & Clark, Ch. 1: Language production—a general introduction R: <b>Do (non-human) Animals communicate?</b> Thorpe: Be an animal (see Canvas for assignments)
3 Sep 2-4	T: <b>How do we learn language?</b> : Cho & O'Grady: Children's acquisition of language R: <b>How does the brain work in communication?</b> / <b>What are some ways we can lose language?</b> Field; Aphasia; Manasco, Ch. 4. Optional readings: <i>The Pun Also Rises</i> OR bring an Internet reading on the brain, language, and humor, metaphoric usage, etc.
4 Sep 9-11	T: <b>INTERLUDE: Language and Research: What are some ways to research conversation?</b> Conversation Analysis: Ten Have Ch. 6 R: Discourse analysis ( <b>pragmatics</b> ): Blum-Kulka; Coordinated Management of Meaning (class notes; reading TBA) <b>F: Art 1 due midnight: Animals, language learning, language loss</b>
5 Sep 16-18	T: <b>UNIT 2: Language Comprehension and Production</b> <b>What happens when we receive language?</b> T: Clark & Clark 2: <b>Comprehension</b> Construction and utilization of meaning; propositions & constituents; syntactic and semantic theories of processing R: <b>Meaning (Semantics)</b> : Ellis Ch. 4; Approaches to meaning; lexical semantics; new words; online reading on semiotics TBA <b>F: Transcripts due (undergraduates) midnight</b>
6 Sep 23-25	T: <b>What happens when we produce language (production?)</b> : Planning & execution; plans & goals; speech errors [planning theory]: Clark & Clark 6: (1) discourse, (2) sentence, (3) constituent R: Clark & Clark 7: (4): Articulatory program and (5) execution (where "speech errors" occur) <b>F: Art 2 due midnight: CA/DA; language comprehension/meaning; Grice; Speech Acts</b>
7 Sep 30-Oct 2	<b>UNIT 3: Conversational Structure and Coherence</b> <b>Conversational Structure: What is the structure of conversation?</b> T: <b>Speech acts, maxims, and implicature</b> : Nofsinger Ch. 2 R: <b>Discourse considerations</b> : Carrol Ch. 9; Coordinated Management of Meaning, Scripts
8 Oct 7-9	T: <b>Narratives and Apologies</b> : Narrative handout; Lakoff (apologies) R: <b>Face management</b> : Cupach & Metts, Ch. 19 <b>F: Exam 1 (digital)</b>
9 Oct 14-16	T: <b>Global coherence (incl. topicality)</b> : Crow R: <b>Local coherence</b> : Ellis Ch. 7
10 Oct 21-23	<b>UNIT 4: Social &amp; Cultural Contexts</b> T: <b>Family</b> : Reynolds (Buenos Dias); <b>How do friends and lovers communicate? Relational Contexts</b> . Relational comm: Idioms, metaphors, RIAs, complaints, teasing: Metts & Groscurth (handout): Idioms & relationships R.: <b>Work/classroom</b> : Reading TBA
11 Oct 28-30	<b>UNIT 5: Identities in Conversation: Ability, Race &amp; Ethnicity; Sex &amp; Gender; Power</b> T: <b>American dialects</b> ; "race," ethnicity, and communication: Readings TBA R: <b>Sex and gender differences</b> in language: Tannen; Zimmerman & West <b>F: Art 3 due midnight: Meaning; planning a message; face management, speech acts, topicality, coherence</b>
12 Nov 4-6	T: Masculinity and communication: Coates; LeMaster & Johnson R: Power in language and interaction (van Dijk, 2003)
13 Nov 11-13	T: Discourse & Culture: Goddard & Wierzbicka exercise R: Culture continued: Donohue show in Russia: SPEAKING exercise <b>F: Art 4 due midnight: Make up a missing paper or revise a lower-score paper (optional)</b>

14 Nov 18-20	T: Ludden 10: Signed Language: <b>Guest speaker: Stephanie Lipe</b> R: Guest lecture: TBA: Implicit bias and microaggressions F: <b>Analysis of Conversation papers due</b>
Nov 25-27	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>
15 Dec 2-4	<b>How do languages vary around the world?</b> [Specific languages may change] T: Bangla (Bangladesh); Ewe (Ghana) R: Arabic; Turkish

**Final: TBA**