

CDM 370: Psychology of Language

Fall 2026— TR 9:35-10:50, Fell 125

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

Updated: 08/11/2026

A brain is worth little without a tongue. – <i>French proverb</i>	
Instructor: John R. Baldwin	Office: Fell Hall 420
Office Hours: MW 2-3; TR 2-4 or by appointment	Office Phone: 309-438-7110
Topics, Events, Extra Credit (See Canvas)	Email: jrbaldw@ilstu.edu

Course Texts:

In the past, the course was all readings, but many students found some of the readings “dense,” so I have adopted a textbook. Still, some ideas will be *based on* readings that are no longer required. I will make these available as optional readings, only keeping previous readings that are necessary for the course. These will be in Canvas “Modules,” linked to the module for the week we cover them. I have chosen the book that students seemed to like the readings the most from:

Carroll, D. W. (2008). *Psychology of language* (5th ed.). Wadsworth-Cengage.

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

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—the classroom, workplace, or romantic relationship. 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.

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 class concepts to 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	09/11/26	30	___/30
• Artifact 2	10/02/26	30	___/30
• Artifact 3	10/30/26	30	___/30
• Artifact 4/make-up assignment	11/13/26	30	___
Exams			___/100
• Exam 1: Midterm	10/9/26		___/50
• Exam 2: Final	Day of final (f2f)		___/50
Research Paper:		100	___/100
Transcripts	09/18/26		
Final paper	11/20/26		
TOTAL			320

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, 7th 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
- 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/>

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Updated 08/13/2026

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, linked from specific modules, with references in module.**

Wk	
1 Aug 18-20	Introduction to course UNIT 1: Language and the Brain T: Intro to the Course: What is the nature of language? Basic elements of language; roles in communication; Ellis, Ch. 1 (last section only : 10 points about language) R: Carroll, Ch. 1: An intro to “psychology of language” (see Module for details).
2 Aug 25-26	T: Carroll, Ch. 2: Linguistic principles: phonemes, morphemes, and such R: Do (non-human) Animals communicate? Thorpe: Be an animal (see Canvas for assignments)
3 Sep 1-3	T: How do we learn language?: CHOOSE 1: Carroll Ch. 10 or 11 (Baldwin will summarize 12) R: How does the brain work in communication? / What are some ways we can lose language? Field; Aphasia; Manasco, Ch. 4; and some ideas from Carroll Ch. 13
4 Sep 8-10	INTERLUDE: Language and Research: T: What are some ways to research conversation? Conversation Analysis: Ten Have Ch. 6 R: Discourse analysis (pragmatics): Blum-Kulka; Coordinated Management of Meaning F: Art 1 due midnight: Animals, language learning, language loss
5 Sep 15-17	UNIT 2: Language Comprehension and Production T: What happens when we receive language? Perception of Language: Carroll Ch. 4 R: Meaning (Semantics): The Internal Lexicon: Carroll Ch. 5 F: Transcripts due (undergraduates) midnight
6 Sep 22-24	T: Sentence comprehension and memory (Carroll Ch. 6); some notes from Clark & Clark R: What happens when we produce language (production?): Carroll Ch. 8
7 Sep 29 – Oct 1	UNIT 3: Conversational Structure and Coherence Conversational Structure: What is the structure of conversation? T: Speech acts, maxims, and implicature (a closer look!): Nofsinger Ch. 2 R: Conversational Interaction: Carroll Ch. 9; Coordinated Management of Meaning, Scripts F: Art 2 due midnight: CA/DA; language comprehension/meaning; Grice; Speech Acts
8 Oct 6-8	T: Narratives and Apologies: Narrative handout; Lakoff (apologies) R: Face management: Cupach & Metts Ch. 19 F: Exam 1 (digital)
9 Oct 13-15	T: Global coherence (incl. topicality): Crow R: Local coherence: Carroll Ch 7
10 Oct 20-22	UNIT 4: Social & Cultural Contexts T: How do friends and lovers communicate: Relational Contexts. Relational comm: Idioms, metaphors, RIAs, complaints, teasing: Metts & Groscurth (handout): Idioms & relationships; Reynolds: swearing R: Technology and language: Reading TBA
11 Oct 27-29	UNIT 5: Identities in Conversation: Ability, Race & Ethnicity; Sex & Gender; Power T: American dialects; “intergroup” communication: dialect handout; Readings TBA R: Sex and gender differences in language: Tannen; Zimmerman & West F: Art 3 due midnight: Meaning; planning a message; face management, speech acts, topicality, coherence
12 Nov 3-5	T: Masculinity and communication: Coates; LeMaster & Johnson R: Power in language and interaction: van Dijk, 2003
13 Nov 10-12	T: Discourse & Culture: Goddard & Wierzbicka exercise R: Culture continued: Donohue show in Russia: SPEAKING exercise F: Art 4 due midnight: Make up a missing paper or revise a lower-score paper (optional)
14 Nov 17-19	T: Ludden 10: Signed Language: Guest speaker: TBA R: Guest lecture: TBA: Implicit bias and microaggressions F: Analysis of Conversation papers due
Nov 24-26	Thanksgiving Break
15 Dec 1-3	How do languages vary around the world? [Specific languages may change]: Carroll Ch. 14 T: Bangla (Bangladesh); Ewe (Ghana) R: Arabic; Turkish

Final: TBA