

# Perception, Cognition, and Language

ENGL 5337/PHIL 5331

Spring 2015

Texas Tech University

**Instructors:** Dr. Aaron Braver  
aaron.braver@ttu.edu  
<http://www.aaronbraver.com>  
English/Philosophy 312C

Dr. Alex Grzankowski  
alex.grzankowski@ttu.edu  
<http://www.myweb.ttu.edu/agrzanko/>  
English/Philosophy 265E

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 10–12\*                      Wednesdays, 10–12\*

\*Please make an appointment before stopping by.

**Class Meetings:**                                      Wednesdays 12–2:50  
English/Philosophy 107

## About this course

This course explores the various interactions between perception, cognition, and language. Some representative questions include:

- Is the way things look influenced by the language you use?
- Is the mind modular?
- What is the structure of mental representation?
- Can your beliefs make things look or sound different?
- If your language categorizes, e.g., snow in a fine-grained manner, are you in a better position to think about the varying kinds of snow than someone who speaks another language?

These questions all suggest various ways in which perception, cognition, and language interact with one another; at the same time, there is persuasive evidence that the mind is modular—that these systems are isolated from one another.

## By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Explain the role of content in contemporary theorizing about the mind.
- Offer considerations for whether perception is affected by our cognitive system and what might count as evidence.
- Explain why many linguists dismiss the strongest forms of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.
- Assess evidence for Universal Grammar.

## Materials

There are two required books for this course:

- The Mechanical Mind by Tim Crane. Available online at <http://michaeljohnsonphilosophy.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Mechanical-Mind.pdf>
- The Language Instinct by Steven Pinker. ISBN: 978-0061336461.

Additional readings will be posted on the course Blackboard site.

### **Assignments and grading**

Two term papers, 12–15 pages each.

- Paper 1, due March 25, will cover material from the first half of the semester.
- Paper 2, due April 29, will cover material from the second half of the semester.
- You will need to propose a topic for each paper by March 4 (Paper 1) and April 8 (Paper 2). Proposals should be 1–2 paragraphs explaining your topic and the direction you plan to take the paper. We will also hold out-of-class meetings to discuss paper topics as needed.

### Reading summaries and discussion questions

- For each assigned reading provide a brief summary of the main points, along with 2–3 questions for in-class discussion. These should be turned in on the day a reading is due.

Your grades will be assigned as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Numerical score</u>	<u>Letter grade</u>
Paper 1 proposal	5%	95–100%	A+
Paper 1	40%	90–94.99%	A
Paper 2 proposal	5%	85–89.99%	B+
Paper 2	40%	80–84.99%	B
Reading summaries and questions	10%	75–79.99%	C+
		70–74.99%	C
		65–69.99%	D+
		60–64.99%	D
		> 60%	F

### **Policies and expectations**

#### Late work

Late work will receive zero points unless arranged in advance with an instructor.

#### Students with Disabilities

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements, should contact the instructors as soon possible to make the necessary arrangements. Students must present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, please contact Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or call (806) 742-2405.

Note that it is your responsibility to provide your instructor with a Letter of Accomodation (LOA) within the first week of class, or within one week of receiving the LOA, so please bring your LOA as soon as possible. Further, the LOA becomes effective only after it is signed by the instructors, and is not retroactive.

**Academic integrity/plagiarism**

We take cheating and plagiarism very seriously. As a general policy, all such cases will be referred to the office of student conduct with a recommendation for the fullest sanctions, as well as automatic failure for the course. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with TTU’s statement on academic integrity and come speak with us if you have any questions:

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentconduct/>

**Course schedule**

This schedule is subject to change. Please pay attention for announcements either in class or via email.

Date	Topics	Readings/Assignments
1/14	Introduction to course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• syllabus, main topics</li> </ul> Introduction to intentionality and content of perception and cognition.	Be sure you have read chapters 1 and 2 from the Crane book as assigned as background to the course.  Siegel, S. (2010). <i>The Contents of Visual Experience</i> , New York: Oxford University Press. <b>Ch. 2</b>  Also helpful (but optional): <a href="http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mental-representation/">http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mental-representation/</a>  <a href="http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-contents/">http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-contents/</a>
1/21	The vehicles of mental content	Fodor, Jerry A. (1987). ‘Why there still has to be a language of thought.’ In <i>Psychosemantics</i> . MIT Press.  Fred Dretske (1981). <i>Knowledge and the Flow of Information</i> . MIT Press. <b>Ch. 6</b>

		<p>Fodor, Jerry A. (2007). The revenge of the given. In Brian P. McLaughlin &amp; Jonathan D. Cohen (eds.), <i>Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind</i>. Blackwell. 105--116.</p> <p>A useful resource:  <a href="http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/language-thought/">http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/language-thought/</a></p> <p>Optional but helpful:          Laurence, S. &amp; Margolis, E. (1997). 'Regress arguments against the language of thought.' <i>Analysis</i> 57 (1):60-66.</p>
1/28	Non-conceptual content	<p>Heck, R. (2007). 'Are there different kinds of content?' In Brian P. McLaughlin &amp; Jonathan D. Cohen (eds.), <i>Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind</i>. Blackwell. 117-38.</p> <p>Stalnaker, R. (1998). 'What might nonconceptual content be?' <i>Philosophical Issues</i> 9:339-352.</p> <p>Speaks, J (2005). 'Is there a problem about nonconceptual content?' <i>Philosophical Review</i> 114 (3):359-98.</p>
2/4	Language of thought	<p>Selections from Fodor, J.A. (1975) <i>Language of Thought</i></p> <p>Selections from Jackendoff, R.S. 1987. <i>Consciousness and the computational mind</i>. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press</p> <p>Casasanto, D. &amp; Boroditsky, L. (2008). Time in the Mind: Using space to think about time. <i>Cognition</i> (106), 579–593.  <a href="http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~lera/papers/duration-cognition-2008.pdf">http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~lera/papers/duration-cognition-2008.pdf</a></p>
2/11	Background on modularity and cognitive penetration.	<p>Stokes, Dustin (2013). Cognitive Penetrability of Perception. <i>Philosophy Compass</i> 8 (7):646-663.</p>

		<p>Carruthers, Peter (2006). The case for massively modular models of mind. In Robert J. Stainton (ed.), <u>Contemporary Debates in Cognitive Science</u>. Blackwell.</p> <p>Jesse J. Prinz (2006). Is the mind really modular? In Robert J. Stainton (ed.), <u>Contemporary Debates in Cognitive Science</u>. Blackwell. 22--36.</p>
2/18	Can cognition influence perception? (1)	<p>Fodor, J. (1984). 'Observation Reconsidered.' <i>Philosophy of Science</i> 51: 23-43.</p> <p>Churchland, P. (1988). 'Perceptual Plasticity and Theoretical Neutrality: A Reply to Jerry Fodor.' <i>Philosophy of Science</i> 55: 167-187.</p> <p>Fodor, J. (1988). 'A reply to Churchland's 'Perceptual plasticity and theoretical neutrality.' <i>Philosophy of Science</i> 55: 188-198.</p>
2/25	Can cognition influence perception?	<p>Siegel, S. (2010). <i>The Contents of Visual Experience</i>, New York: Oxford University Press. Chs. 3 and 4</p> <p>Robert Briscoe (forthcoming). Cognitive Penetration and the Reach of Phenomenal Content. In Athanassios Raftopoulos &amp; John Zeimbekis (eds.), <i>Cognitive Penetrability</i>. Oxford University Press.</p> <p><i>Tentative:</i> Dretske, F. (forthcoming). Perception versus Conception: The Goldilocks Test In Athanassios Raftopoulos &amp; John Zeimbekis (eds.), <i>Cognitive Penetrability</i>. Oxford University Press.</p>
3/4	Can cognition influence perception? (3)	<p>Bhalla &amp; Proffitt, (1999). 'Visual-Motor Recalibration in Geographical Slant Perception.</p>

	<b>Paper 1 proposal due</b>	<p>Chaz Firestone and Brian J. Scholl. (2014). “Top-Down” Effects Where None Should Be Found: The El Greco Fallacy in Perception Research.</p> <p>Macpherson, F. (2012). Cognitive Penetration of Colour Experience: Rethinking the Issue in Light of an Indirect Mechanism. <i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i> 84 (1):24-62.</p>
3/11	Cognitive penetration and non-conceptual content	<p>Raftopoulos, Athanassios (2013). The cognitive impenetrability of the content of early vision is a necessary and sufficient condition for purely nonconceptual content. <i>Philosophical Psychology</i> (5):1-20.</p> <p>Macpherson, F. (forthcoming). ‘Cognitive Penetration and Nonconceptual Content’. In Zeimbekis, John &amp; Raftopoulos, Athanassios (eds.) <i>Cognitive Penetrability</i>. Oxford University Press.</p>
3/18	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
3/25	<p>Eskimo vocabulary Sapir-Whorf Linguistic relativity</p> <p><b>Paper 1 due</b></p>	<p>Selections from Whorf’s early work</p> <p>Summary of Sapir-Whorf</p> <p>“Eskimo vocabulary hoax” (Martin &amp; Pullum)</p>
4/1	Empirical studies of linguistic relativity	<p>Pinker. Language Instinct, Ch. 3</p> <p>Selections from empirical studies of linguistic relativity</p>
4/8	<p>Universal grammar</p> <p><b>Paper 2 proposal due</b></p>	<p>Pinker. Language Instinct, Ch. 8</p> <p>Chomsky, N. 1991. Language and cognitive science: Problems and mysteries. In Kasher, A (ed) 1991 The Chomskyan turn. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.</p>

4/15	Modularity of mind/language	<p>Fodor, J.A. 1983. The modularity of mind. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press</p> <p>Fodor, J.A. and commentators. 1985. Précis and multiple book review of “The Modularity of Mind”. Behavioral and Brain Sciences 8, 1-42</p> <p>Karmiloff-Smith, A. Modularity of mind. MIT ECS</p> <p>Frazier, L. Modularity and language. MIT ECS</p>
4/22	<p>Language Acquisition</p> <p>Poverty of Stimulus</p> <p>Speech perception</p>	<p>Pinker. Language instinct, Ch. 9</p> <p>Pinker. Language instinct, Ch. 6, 7</p>
4/29	<p>Speech perception</p> <p>Word recognition</p> <p>Sentence parsing</p> <p><b>Paper 2 due</b></p>	TBD