

LIN6932 - Sentence and Discourse Processing

Mondays, Periods 6-8 (12:50-3:50pm), Anderson 13

Professor

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Office Hours:

Wednesdays 12:30-3

Thursdays 1-3:45

Course description

Within psycholinguistics, there is a particular interest in how people process sentences both in their own right and when they are part of a larger discourse. Processing and comprehending sentences involves the coordination of many levels of linguistic representation and engages with other cognitive systems including memory and attention. This course focuses on four central areas within sentence and discourse processing:

1. **Unbounded dependencies** – *Who is Sherlock searching for ____ ?*
How are wh-words and other displaced elements in a sentence linked correctly in order to understand sentences that involve wh-questions and relative clauses?
2. **Information structure** – *It's Watson that Sherlock's trying to find.*
How do information statuses like focus and topic influence processing and attention?
3. **Coreference** – *I don't know if he'll find him in time.*
How do recognize and interpret when referents are (re-)referred to?
4. **Dialogue & Alignment** – *I think he might!*
How do speakers unconsciously influence each other during dialogue and what does this mean for language processing?

Course goals

Students who successfully complete this course should, by the end of the course, be able to demonstrate:

- Understanding of the core questions and issues within each unit
- Knowledge of the main research findings for each unit
- The methodology and argumentation used to answer questions about sentence processing

A secondary goal of the course is for students to be able to critically apply this knowledge when considering popular science reporting on sentence processing and language-related cognitive science more broadly, and when reading primary research in related areas.

Assessment

There are no exams in this course. Instead, there are a series of assignments designed to promote understanding of the questions, hypotheses, debates and findings for the topics covered in this course. Active participation in all in-class activities is expected, and will be reflected in the grades given for the associated assignments.

| Assignment | Percentage of Final Grade |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Reading question | 8% (2% each) |
| Snap Shot | 20% (5% each) |
| Design lab | 20% (10% each) |
| Debate | 20% |
| Discussion paper presentation | 10% |
| Paper summary | 12% (3% each) |
| Bottom-line report | 8% (2% each) |
| Participation in discussion | 2% |

Grades will be assigned based on the following distribution:

| | | |
|------------|----------------|------------|
| 88-90.9 A- | 91-100 A | |
| 78-80.9 B- | 81-84.9 B | 85-87.9 B+ |
| 68-70.9 C- | 71-74.9 C | 75-77.9 C+ |
| 58-60.9 D- | 61-64.9 D | 65-67.9 D+ |
| | (Below 58 = E) | |

Please note that a grade of C- is *not* a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, or College Basic distribution credit. For further information on UF's Grading Policy, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx#hgrades>

Assignment Descriptions

Reading question: Submit at least one question about the group reading for that class. The question may be of any kind that indicates engagement with the article, e.g. a clarification, discussion, or further research question.

Snap Shot: Abstract books from four recent conferences that are highly relevant to sentence and discourse processing will be available on Canvas. For each book, students will be asked to form groups and assess the abstracts quantitatively (e.g. what are the research areas getting the most attention, how many in each major area or topic?) and qualitatively (e.g. which abstracts appear the most interesting to you and why? Are any of them especially relevant to the current unit?) Groups will present and discuss their finding in class, and each student will submit an individual paper (250-500 words) that summarizes their findings.

Design Lab (Units 1 and 2 only): Students will be asked to form groups and design an experiment to test a prediction/hypothesis from these units. Specific details will be provided on Canvas and discussed in class.

Debate (Units 3 and 4 only): Students will be required to participate in one debate in either Unit 3 or 4. Specific details will be provided on Canvas and discussed in class.

Required Group Readings: These papers will be read by all students and are to be read BEFORE the day they are assignment. They will be available on Canvas.

Discussion Papers: Each student will present one 20-25 minute presentation of a research paper (chosen from Presentation Papers on Canvas). Other students are NOT required to read these papers, but may do so. All students are expected to be attentive and ask questions about the paper as it is presented. The presenter will be expected to provide a clear summary of the paper and facilitate discussion.

Paper Summary: Students must pick one of the discussion papers NOT covered in class and write a short (250-500 word) summary of the main hypothesis, methods, and results of the paper, ending with a short statement about the student's assessment of the paper. At least ONE of these summaries must be from the Further Reading Papers section on Canvas.

Bottom-line Report: Students will write a short (~500 word) assessment of what they think the key debates and questions of the research covered by the unit are, and what the answers/resolution are (or definitely are not) – basically, this should be a synthesis of the key points of the unit.

Readings

All readings will be made available on Canvas.

Other course policies

Students with Special Needs: Students requesting accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to me when requesting accommodation.

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. An academic honesty offence is defined as the act of lying, cheating, or stealing information so that one gains academic advantage. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment. For more information, refer to:
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>.

Make-up Policy: In accordance with UF policy, students will be allowed to make up work that they miss as the result of an excused absence. For absences that can be foreseen (e.g. religious observance, UF-related travel), students MUST inform me about the absence in advance so that arrangements can be made. For unexpected absences (e.g. illness), students should contact me as soon as reasonably possible.

(See <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> for a list of excusable absences.)

Schedule (subject to change)

| Week (Date) | In-class Activities | Assignments Due | Required Group Readings |
|-------------|----------------------------|--|---|
| 1 (1/12) | Introduction to the course | | |
| 2 (1/19) | NO CLASS (MLK) | | |
| 3 (1/26) | Long-distance Dependencies | Intro lecture Paper presentations (2) Design lab / Snapshot prep | Reading question Philips & Wagers (2007) |
| 4 (2/2) | | Concentration lecture Paper presentations (3) Snapshot: AMLaP 2014 | Snapshot summary Paper summary <i>none</i> |
| 5 (2/9) | | Design Lab presentations Wrap-up discussion/lecture | Design lab report Bottom-line report Wagers & Phillips (2014) |

| Week (Date) | In-class Activities | Assignments Due | Required Group Readings | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|
| 6 (2/16) | Information Structure | Intro lecture Paper presentations Design lab prep | Reading question Cowles (2012) | |
| 7 (2/23) | | Concentration lecture Paper presentations Snapshot: <i>CUNY 2015</i> | Snapshot summary Paper summary <i>none</i> | |
| 8 (3/2) | | <i>NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)</i> | | |
| 9 (3/9) | | Design Lab presentations Wrap-up discussion/lecture | Design lab report Bottom-line report | Benatar & Clifton (2014) |
| 10 (3/16) | Co-reference | Intro lecture Paper presentations Debate prep | Reading question Cowles (2010): <i>Section on Coreference</i> Almor & Eimas (2008) | |
| 11 (3/23) | | CUNY report & lecture Paper presentations Snapshot: Text & Discourse 2014 | Snapshot summary Paper summary <i>none</i> | |
| 12 (3/30) | | Debate Wrap-up discussion/lecture | Bottom-line report | Kaiser (2011) |
| 13 (4/6) | Dialogue & Alignment | Intro lecture Paper presentations Debate prep | <i>Reading question</i> Pickering & Garrod (2013) | |
| 14 (4/13) | | Concentration lecture Paper presentations Snapshot: TBA | Snapshot summary Paper summary <i>none</i> | |
| 15 (4/20) | | Debate Wrap-up discussion/lecture | Bottom-line report | Gambi & Pickering (2013) |