Course Syllabus

Psychology 7/8503 (section 2)
Seminar in Experimental Psychology:
Pragmatics and Figurative Language
Spring 2006

Meeting times: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:40-11:05
227 Fedex Institute of Technology

Instructor: Roger Kreuz
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Office hours: Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4-5, and by appointment


Format: The class meetings will primarily consist of student-led discussions of the readings. The discussion leader for each class will provide an overview of the readings and moderate a discussion of the issues.

Readings: For each class, there will be 35-50 pages of assigned readings. These journal articles and book chapters (except for the Clark book) will be made available to the discussion leaders by the instructor. It will be the leaders’ responsibility to photocopy sets for the class and to make them available to their classmates in a timely way.

Evaluation: Students will be expected to function as discussion leaders about three times during the term. In addition, students will be required to write a 500-word commentary on the readings for each class, and to submit them to the instructor and the discussion leader. More details about the commentaries can be found at the end of the syllabus.

Topics and Readings

January 17: Orientation
  • Introductions and discussion of format
  • Selection of discussion leaders (free-for-all; no brawling, please)

January 19: Introduction to Pragmatics (Kreuz)
January 24: Common Ground I (Gibson)


January 26: Common Ground II (Jeuniaux)


January 31: Collaboration I (Gibson)


February 02: Collaboration II (Gibson)


February 07: Audience Design (Ramsdell)


February 09: Overhearers (Dempsey)


February 14: Coordination (Duran)


February 16: Perspective Taking I (Dempsey)


February 21: Perspective Taking II (Dempsey)


February 23: Speaker Meaning (Ramsdell)


February 28: Politeness and Indirectness (Briner)


March 02: No class
March 07, 09: Independent fieldwork in pragmatics

Spring Break

March 14: Pragmatics and Paralinguistics (Jeuniaux)


March 16: Introduction to Figurative Language (Kreuz)

March 21: Introduction to Metaphor (Caucci)


March 23: Metaphor Comprehension I (Briner)


March 28: Metaphor Comprehension II (Caucci)


March 30: Irony Processing (Duran)


April 04: Irony and Negation (Jeuniaux)


April 06: Ironic Criticism (Briner)


April 11: Irony and Spontaneous Speech (Caucci)


April 13: Irony and Metaphor (Gibson)


April 18: Production of Figurative Language (Ramsdell)


April 20: Corpus-based Approaches (Duran)


April 25: Irony and Children (Ramsdell)


Some Notes on Being the Discussion Leader

Each of you will be in charge of the discussion about three times during the term. Obviously, you should be well prepared to discuss the issues at hand. I would advise you to read the paper(s) well in advance, and you may want to read some of articles that the authors cite. Of course, you should feel free to come and talk to me about any concerns you have. (You’ll also have the incredibly insightful commentaries of your classmates to help you.) Your performance as discussion leader will constitute one half of your class grade.

Some Notes on the Commentaries

An important skill to learn is how to critically but fairly evaluate a research project, and then distill your thoughts into a coherent written document. To help you develop this skill, an important part of this course will be the writing of commentaries.

For each class, you will provide a written reaction to the reading(s). This commentary should be around 500 words, and it needs to be submitted to the instructor and the discussion leader at least 12 hours before each class (i.e., by 9:40 p.m. on Monday night for the Tuesday class, and by 9:40 p.m. on Wednesday night for the Thursday class). The commentaries should be submitted, via e-mail, as Word documents.
The commentary should not be a summary of the paper’s methodology and results: that’s why the authors wrote an abstract. Instead, the commentary should focus on questions like the following:

- Does the article explore an important issue?
- Is the methodology appropriate for the question(s) being investigated?
- Are the statistics appropriate for the data?
- Do the authors’ conclusions follow from the data presented? Are you convinced by their argument?
- Are there any alternative explanations for the results?
- Do the experiments have ecological validity?
- Is there a different or better methodology that the authors could have employed?
- Are there any limitations to generalizability?
- Was there anything that was confusing or unexplained?
- Did the authors employ unfamiliar terms or concepts?
- Was there anything noteworthy about the characteristics of the subjects (e.g., small sample size, skewed gender)?
- Was the paper well written and clearly organized?
- Did the authors use tables and figures appropriately? Redundantly? Haphazardly? Not at all?

(Potentially) Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Two commentaries a week!? That’s a lot of work.

A: Yes, it is. But keep in mind that the course has no tests, and no other assignments. And the commentaries will become easier to write by the end of the term – I promise.

Q: I’ve written everything I can think of, but my commentary is only 437 words long. Am I a bad person?

A: Probably not. The 500 word length is simply a guideline; don’t be too obsessed with this number. Some of your papers will be shorter, and others will be longer. However, if you’re routinely writing 800 word commentaries, you should try to be more succinct. And if you’re routinely writing 300 word missives, I’ll probably notice (and not be impressed).

Q: If there are two readings for a given class, do I need to given them equal time in the commentary?

A: Nope. For whatever reason, you may have more to say about one paper than another. However, you should address at least some issues in each article.
Q: My pet dog/cat/weasel just died, and I'm pretty broken up. Is it possible to skip the assignment if I can't bring myself to write?

A: Yes, I'll allow each of you to skip one commentary assignment during the term. However, if you skip more than that, you'll need to throw yourself on the mercy of the court. Keep in mind that I take these assignments pretty seriously, so don't expect too much sympathy.

Q: I was too hung over to write, so I didn't submit my paper until midnight (variants: my modem wasn't working, my hard drive died, the dog ate my paper).

A: I expect graduate students to be responsible, but sometimes life does hand you lemons. Please do everything you can to get the commentaries submitted on time. It makes the discussion leaders' job easier if they have your thoughts in a timely manner. And if any of you are consistently late, you'll be hearing from me.

Q: Will I get feedback on my commentaries from you?

A: Although I will read all the commentaries carefully, I'll only provide feedback if I spot problems (so, no news is good news).

Q: Do I need to write a commentary for the days when I'm a discussion leader?

A: No – you're off the hook for that class. That's one of the perks of being discussion leader.