Concordia University, Winter 2000
Cognition II (Psyc 353)
Topics in Language and Concepts

Instructor:

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NOTE:

The following outline is tentative (last update: <u>December 1, 1999</u>). If you have questions about this course, you are encouraged to contact the instructor.

Who should take this course?

Everybody interested in language and mind, in particular intermediate to advanced Psychology majors. Students majoring in Philosophy, Linguistics, Education, Computer Science, and related fields are also encouraged to take the course since it will explore themes that are at the core of the interdisciplinary field known as Cognitive Science. Please note that the <u>prerequisite</u> for this course is PSYC 352, <u>Cognition I, or permission from the instructor</u>.

Outline:

This course will explore the interface between two central themes in cognitive psychology: <u>language and concepts</u>. The language system is composed of linguistic-specific representations over which processes enable us to produce and understand utterances. The conceptual system is comprised by concepts, which are taken to be the very elements of thought and higher cognition. The two systems have a very intricate relation – which poses interesting questions regarding the way we process and represent the structure and content of natural language expressions. Among the topics we will review are: models of sentence parsing (i.e., to a first approximation, models about the computation of the structure of sentences), models of lexical access (i.e., access to the semantic/conceptual representation of words), the morphological-conceptual mapping (i.e., how morphemes of natural language are "translated" into concepts), the nature of the representation of concepts (i.e., the stuff concepts are made of), the semantic/conceptual representation of sentences (i.e., how whole sentences are interpreted), and inferential systems (i.e., the kinds of mechanisms that operate over the conceptual representation of words and sentences). Topics such as these will be discussed taking into account classical studies as well as current theoretical and empirical research.

Readings

The required readings will be available at the bookstore in the form of a course pack. The course pack will contain introductory overviews as well as classical and contemporary research papers.

Evaluation

Students will be required to prepare two papers – or one paper and one experimental project – on a topic to be determined in consultation with the instructor. The first paper will be a short literature review (30% of the final grade). The second paper will be a follow up on the first paper and will focus on a specific question – either in the form of an experimental project or theoretical discussion (45% of the final grade). Students will present their papers in class (15%). In addition, participation in class discussions will be evaluated (10%). The following scale will be used in the assignment of letter grades:

A+	90-100		B-	70-72		D	53-56
A-	80-84		C+	67-69		D-	50-52
A	85-89		C	63-66		F	0-50
B+	77-79		C-	60-62			
B	73-76		D+	57-59			