

PSY 260: Evolution of Language

Section T

Spring 2024

12:30-2:45pm

Science Center 133

Instructor:

Jeff Coon

Office: Science Center 150

Email: coon@hanover.edu:

Office Hours: TR 10-11:30am, MWF 2:45-4pm or by appointment

Course Description:

Examines the features of language that make it such a powerful and flexible communication system. Reviews and evaluates theoretical accounts of how our biological and cultural evolution gave rise to these features of modern language and how modern language continues to evolve.

Course Overview and Format:

In this course, we will be investigating where language came from and where it may be going. In doing so, we will move beyond widely accepted science into ideas that are still the subject of considerable debate. In-class activities will involve introducing and applying key ideas, with an emphasis on deciding for yourself whether or not the various proposals are compelling. Some of these activities will involve reading, but with only one exception (see below), time will be set aside in class to complete each reading. There will also be a culminating essay assignment (again, time will be set aside in class) providing an opportunity to focus on an example of changing language that is of particular interest to you.

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

explain Darwinian evolution and key findings regarding the Darwinian evolution of language.

evaluate the applicability of Darwinian evolution to explaining how a culture's ideas (particularly its communication system) change over time.

compare and contrast features of Darwinian and cultural evolution.

analyze examples of language changing over time from the perspective of Darwinian and cultural evolution.

Course Materials:

1. There is no required textbook for this class. Readings (articles and book excerpts) will be available on Moodle.
2. Access to Moodle (<https://moodle.hanover.edu>) and a Hanover email account. Be sure to check both regularly for course news and updates.

Course Requirements:

Introductory Survey: Introduce yourself and your relevant goals/interests. Due 4/29 at 11:59pm

In-class Assignments: The bulk of your grade will come from assignments that we will do together as part of the work we do in class. How many points each assignment is worth varies in proportion to how much work they entail.

In general, it will not be possible to make up these assignments because the associated in-class activities are a fundamental part of them. However, there may be opportunities to receive partial credit, so it is always worth checking in with me if you have to be absent. There will also be extra credit opportunities (see below) that can help compensate for missed assignments.

Essay: We will be using class time to work on the essay, but you may need to finish it on your own. You will first need to introduce a feature of language that is (or has been) changing and explain why it is interesting to you. Second, you will need to analyze the change from an evolutionary perspective. As part of this analysis, you will need to evaluate whether it's actually useful to think of the change as an example of evolution. Third, you will need to discuss a question you have about how or why the change is happening and an idea for how you could go about answering that question. Finally, you will need to consider the broader implications of the change. *Check the rubric file on Moodle for more details.*

Evaluation and Grading:

Assignments: 70% Essay 30%

General Extra Credit (up to 6 points; max 4 attempts): You can read/listen to essays, articles, or podcasts that expand on the main topics of this course (evolution and language) and submit a 300-500 word summary. Each summary that demonstrates understanding of and engagement is worth up to 2 points (partial credit is possible). Check Moodle for more information about how the summaries will be graded, as well as a running list of acceptable sources. I am open to suggestions if you think you have found a suitable source.

Grade	Points
A	93+
A-	90-92.9
B+	87-89.9
B	83-86.9
B-	80-82.9
C+	77-79.9
C	73-76.9
C-	70-72.9
D+	67-69.9
D	63-66.9
D-	60-62.9
F	0-59.9

Essay Extra Credit (2 points): On 5/22 and 5/23 (Wed/Thur), we'll work on essays in class. Afterwards, you'll present the central topic of your essay (Wed) and something

concerning (Thur). You'll get a point for each. These are intended to cushion your essay grade, giving you some credit for making an honest effort and contributing to the class.

Course Schedule:

	In-class Topic	Readings	Assignments
4/29	Intro to Evolution	<i>The Evolution of Language</i> by W. Tecumseh Fitch (Introduction and 1.1-1.2)	Survey due@11:59pm ; Exit Ticket
4/30	Evolution of Dogs	<i>Wild Foxes Can Be Transformed into Pets in a Few Generations</i> by Lyudmila Trut & Lee Alan Dugatkin	Domesticating Dogs WS
5/1	Patterns of Evolution	<i>We're the Only Animals with Chins and No One Knows Why</i> by Ed Yong <i>The Panda's Thumb</i> by Stephen Jay Gould <i>Why Don't Animals Have Wheels?</i> by Richard Dawkins	It's Not Fair WS; Chins, Thumbs, and Wheels Presentation
5/2	Evolutionary Trees		Phylogenetic Trees; BLAST
5/3	Evolution of Altruism	<i>Darwin's Cathedral</i> by David Sloan Wilson (Ch. 1 pp. 5-28)	Darwin's Cathedral WS
5/6	Intro to Lang. Evolution	<i>The Descent of Man</i> by Charles Darwin (Ch. 3 pp. 84-92)	Darwin on Language WS
5/7	Anatomical Requirements	<i>Monkeys Could Talk, but They Don't Have the Brains for It</i> by Carl Zimmer	Making the Noises WS
5/8	What Words Mean	<i>The Symbolic Species</i> by Terrence W. Deacon (Ch. 2 pp. 59-68)	The Symbolic Species WS
5/9	Interpreting Language		Interpreting Language Exit Ticket
5/10	Animal Approximations	<i>The "Clever Hans Phenomenon" Revisited</i> by Laasya Samhita & Hans J Gross	Animal Approximations WS
5/13	Memes	<i>A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse</i> by Stephen Jay Gould	Memes WS
5/14	Comm. Systems	<i>The Information</i> by James Gleick (Ch. 1)	Drums That Talk WS
5/15	Evolving Comm. Systems		Evolving Comm. System WS & Dictionary
5/16	Alien Language Experiment	<i>The Language Instinct</i> by Stephen Pinker (Ch. 2 pp. 32-39)	Attend Experiment Timeslot Vertical & Horizontal Transmission pt. 1
5/17	Horizontal vs. Vertical Transmission		Vertical & Horizontal Transmission pt. 2
5/20	Evolving Languages		Lexical Dark Matter WS; Google Ngram
5/21	Dialects & Linguistic Fossils	<i>How TikTok Created a New Accent</i> by Sophia Smith Galer <i>The Animal Instinct that Drives Workers to Adopt Corporate Jargon</i> by Lillian Stone <i>Isolated for Six Months, Scientists in Antarctica Began to Develop Their Own Accent</i> by Richard Gray	Dialects Presentation; Linguistic Fossils
5/22	Language Trees		Language Trees WS; Essay Idea
5/23	Whorf-Sapir		Whorf WS; Essay Concern
5/24	Telegrams/Texts	<i>Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph</i> by James W Carey	Telegrams & Texts WS; Essay due@11:59pm

Accessibility Services for Students with Disabilities:

Hanover College offers accessibility services to students with documented physical, visual, hearing, learning, or psychiatric disabilities. Any Hanover student is eligible for special services or accommodations if: 1) The student self-identifies that he or she has a disability and needs accommodation; 2) The student provides appropriate and verifiable documentation of the disability; and 3) The student provides notification in a timely fashion. For accessibility services, [Email Accessibility Services](#) or call 812-866-6836. The Accessibility Services (AS) office is in the Gladish Center for Teaching and Learning on the first floor of Duggan Library.

Academic Integrity/Honesty:

In the event of academic dishonesty, students will receive a 0 for the assignment at minimum. All instances of academic dishonesty are reported to the chair of the Student Academic Assistance Committee, and repeated instances of academic dishonesty will subject a student to additional penalties up to and including dismissal from the College as outlined in the College Catalog.

As stated in the Hanover College Principles, students, faculty, staff, and trustees of Hanover College seek to promote academic, personal, and moral growth within a safe, challenging, and responsive community. This includes a commitment to academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity have a broad impact on the College and will result in College review and action.

Academic dishonesty includes any action with the intent to deceive in order to obtain an unfair advantage, as well as any act of aiding and abetting academic dishonesty. The Hanover College statement on academic dishonesty may be found in the Catalog and in the Student Handbook.

Artificial Intelligence: Tools such as ChatGPT can be quite helpful and are not going away. However, those tools are best used by someone who can evaluate and critique the output. As is commonly said, “you won’t lose your job to AI, you’ll lose your job to someone who uses it better than you.” The primary goal of this class is for you to have an understanding of key concepts in psychology. Anything you submit in this class needs to reflect your own thinking. If AI tools are helpful in developing and refining your thinking, that is an acceptable usage. If you are relying on AI to do the thinking for you (e.g., writing an essay), that is counterproductive in the long term and defeats the purpose of the class. As such, it will be considered academic dishonesty. If you have questions about appropriate use of AI tools, please come speak with me.

Nondiscrimination:

Hanover College is committed to providing equal access to its educational programs, activities, and facilities to all otherwise qualified students without discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, color, creed, religion, sex, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other category protected by applicable state or federal law. An Equal Opportunity employer, the College also affirms its commitment to nondiscrimination in its employment policies and practices. In compliance with Title IX (20 U.S.C Sec. 1681 et seq.) Hanover College prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual harassment. For student related disability discrimination concerns, contact the Gladish Center for Teaching and Learning at

812-866-6840. For other discrimination complaints, including any arising under Title IX, contact the Title IX Coordinator at 812-866-6740 or the Deputy Title IX Coordinator at 812-866-7097.

Statement on Self-Care:

Your success in this course and throughout your college career depends heavily on your personal health and wellbeing. Stress is a common part of the college experience, and it often can be compounded by unexpected life changes outside the classroom. Your other professors and I strongly encourage you to take care of yourself throughout the term before the demands of midterms and finals reach their peak. Before circumstances and conditions become overwhelming, please don't hesitate to speak with me about any difficulty you may be having that may affect your academic performance. Please know as well that there are several support services on campus available to assist you, as needed. You can make appointments with Health Services by calling x-6102. Appointments for Counseling Services can be made online at any time through [MyHanover](#).

Health Services

Christy Ownbey, APRN, CPNP-PC, Director of Health Services
812-866-7082 or ownbey@hanover.edu

Gladish Center for Teaching and Learning

Katy Lowe Schneider, Associate Provost for Student Outcomes
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Counseling Services

Sara Crafton, Director of Counseling Services
812-866-7074 or crafton@hanover.edu

Campus Food Pantry

Rev. Catherine Knott, Ph.D.
812-866-7087 or knott@hanover.edu

Ball Family Chaplain

Rev. Catherine Knott, Ph.D.
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Levett Career Center

Jenny Moss, Executive Director
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