

COGS 301/401. Cognitive Diversity

Spring 2012. Meetings: T & Th 10:00-11:15 am, Crawford 618

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office hours: Tuesdays 12:30-2:00 pm

Course description: Do linguistic and cultural differences lead humans to make sense of the world in fundamentally different ways? Among the most remarkable aspects of our species is the staggering variety of linguistic systems and cultural practices that have emerged over our relatively rapid global expansion. In this course we will explore the question of whether such linguistic and cultural diversity entails *cognitive* diversity. In the first part of the course, we will consider in depth debates about the extent to which languages shape how their speakers attend, reason, and remember, reviewing the latest findings on the cross-linguistic conceptualization of domains such as space, time, color, and number. In the second part of the course we will move beyond language to examine cultural practices that involve the coordination of conceptual and material structure, such as Micronesian navigation and abacus. Along with the world's biological and linguistic riches, human cognitive diversity appears to be vanishing, and a major theme of this course will be why as cognitive scientists—and as human beings—we might care.

A note on course format: This course is a seminar consisting of: 1) discussions of readings; 2) student presentations of supplementary readings (see below); and 3) lecture modules. Lecture modules will be used to situate required readings, suggest analytic frameworks, and introduce material not covered in the required readings. The majority of class-time, however, will be spent working through ideas together as a group. Engagement is absolutely essential to the vitality of the class, ~~and for this reason laptops, smart phones, or tablets are not to be used during class meetings.~~

Required text: In addition to journal articles to be distributed in PDF form through Blackboard, we will read and discuss the following book:

Evans, Nicholas (2010). *Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Overview of grade components:

Attendance and engagement — **15%**

“Three things”— **15%**

Presentations (2) — **20%**

Final project — **50% total**

- a) Topic proposal— 5%
- b) Annotated bibliography— 10%
- c) Peer review workshop— 10%
- d) Final paper (2500 words)— 25%

Description of grade components:

Attendance and engagement: You are expected to attend every class and to be a lively participant in class discussions.

Presentations: Each student will give two presentations over the course of the semester. These presentations will be on readings that supplement the required readings. Supplementary readings will mostly be assigned by the instructor, though in some cases the student will have a choice among several options.

“Three things”: For each class, you will submit a “three things” about each reading: 1) one thing you didn’t understand; 2) one criticism; 3) one idea it gave you for future research.

Final project: There is no final exam for this class— rather, there is a final project. The project will be on a topic of your own choosing (subject to instructor approval) and will unfold in a series of steps. These steps include an annotated bibliography, an in-class peer review workshop, and a final written product of <2500 words. More information will be given about the various components of the final project later in the semester.

Requirements and policies

Plagiarism policy: You are responsible for being familiar with CWRU’s academic dishonesty guidelines, which are available on the web. One key to avoiding plagiarism is understanding and using a standard set of citation practices. **For this course, you will be expected to formally cite all sources used for your written assignments using APA (or equivalent) style.** APA style governs how you should refer to sources in the running text, as well as in your references section at the end of your document. Here is an on-line guide to [APA style](#). (**Note:** you are **NOT** expected to use APA style for all aspects of your document, *only* for citations.) If you have any questions about what resources you can and cannot use for a given assignment, please ask.

Course readings: Course readings in addition to Evans (2010) will be made available as PDFs on the blackboard site. **Important:** readings are listed next to the class meeting by which they are to be completed. Note that for certain class meetings you may be asked to review other online materials, all of which will be linked from the schedule.

Course schedule *not set in stone*

Week 1 — The big picture: dimensions of human diversity

Jan 17 Topic: *Course introduction; What is cognitive diversity?*

Jan 19 Topic: *Cognitive diversity in the modern world*
Reading: *Evans (2010) Part 1 (Chs. 1 and 2)*

Week 2 — The big picture (contd.)

Jan 24 Topic: *Cognitive diversity retakes the stage*
Reading: *Henrich et al. (2010) 'The weirdest people in the world'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [1]

Jan 26 Topic: *Linguistic relativity in historical context*
Reading: *Whorf (1956) 'The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [2]

Week 3 — Domains: Color

Jan 31 Topic: *The color universals debate*
Reading: *Evans (2010) Ch. 3; Kay & Berlin (1968) Ch. 1*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [3]

Feb 2 Topic: *The color universals debate (contd.); How to read an empirical report*
Reading: *Heider (1972) 'Universals in color naming and memory'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [4]

Week 4 — Domains: Color (contd.)

Feb 7 Topic: *Counter-universals in the domain of color?*
Reading: *Levinson (2001) 'Yeli Dnye and the theory of basic color terms'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [5] [6]

Feb 9 Topic: *Recent entries in the color debate*
Reading: *Winawer et al. (2007) 'Russian blues reveal effects of language on color discrimination'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [7] [8]

Week 5 — Domains: Space

- Feb 14** Topic: *Concepts of space*
Reading: *Evans (2010), Part IV introduction and Ch. 8*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [9] [10]
- Feb 16** Topic: *Spatial frames of reference*
Reading: *Majid et al. (2004) 'Can language restructure cognition?'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [11] [12]

Week 6— Domains: Space (contd.)

- Feb 21** Topic: *Debating cross-cultural differences in spatial reasoning*
Reading: *Li et al. (2002) 'Turning the tables'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [13]
- Feb 23** Topic: *Debate continues*
Reading: *Haun et al. (2011) 'Plasticity of human spatial cognition'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [14] [15]

Week 7— Domains: Space (contd.); Number

- Feb 28** Topic: *Beyond spatial frames of reference*
Reading: *Bowerman & Choi (2003) 'Space under construction'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [16] [17]
- Mar 1** Topic: *Diversity in number systems*
Reading: [WALS Chapter 131](#) 'Numeral Bases'; *Beller & Bender (2006) 'The limits of counting'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [18]

Week 8— Domains: Number (contd.)

- Mar 6** Topic: *Anumeric Languages*
Reading: *Gordon (2004) 'Numerical cognition without words'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [19] [20]
- Mar 8** Topic: *Body count systems in Papua New Guinea*
Reading: *Saxe (1981) 'Body parts as numerals'*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [21]

Week 9— Domains: Time

- Mar 20** Topic: *Metaphorical construals of time*
Reading: Núñez & Sweetser (2006) 'With the future behind them'
(pgs. 401-419)
Presentations on suppl. reading: [22]
- Mar 22** Topic: *Metaphorical construals of time continued*
Reading: Fuhrman, et al. (2012) 'How linguistic and cultural forces shape conceptions of time'
Presentations on suppl. reading: [23] [24]
Due: Final Project Topic proposal

Week 10— Frontiers in linguistic relativity

- Mar 27** Topic: *Social cognition and evidentiality*
Reading: Evans (2010) Ch. 4
Presentations on suppl. reading: [25]
- Mar 29** Topic: *Grammatical gender*
Reading: Boroditsky, et al. (2003) 'Sex, syntax, and semantics'
Presentations on suppl. reading: [26] [27]

Week 11— Cultural practices: Oral traditions; Navigation

- Apr 3** Topic: *Cultural practices and cognitive tools*
Reading: Wilson (2010) 'The re-tooled mind'
Presentations on suppl. reading: [28]
- Apr 5** Topic: *Oral traditions*
Reading: Evans (2010), Ch. 9
Presentations on suppl. reading: [29] [30]

Week 12— Cultural practices: Navigation; Body count systems

- Apr 10** Topic: *Micronesian navigation*
Reading: Hutchins (1995), Ch. 2
Presentations on suppl. reading: [31]
Due: Final Project Annotated Bibliography
- Apr 12** Topic: *Number lines*
Reading: Debeane et al. (2006) 'Log or linear?'
Presentations on suppl. reading: [32]

Week 13— Cultural practices: Abacus

Apr 17 Topic: *Abacus and “mental abacus”*
Reading: *Frank & Barner (2011) ‘Representing exact number visually using mental abacus’*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [33]

Apr 19 **In-class peer review workshop**

Week 14— Keyboards; Coda

Apr 24 Topic: *Phone keypads and QWERTY keyboards*
Reading: *Topolinski (2011) ‘I 5683 you’*
Presentations on suppl. reading: [34]

Apr 26 Topic: *What next?*
Reading: *Evans (2010), Part V*

Apr 30 **Final Papers Due**