

GE1132: MIND, BRAIN AND LANGUAGE: HOW ARE HUMAN BEINGS SPECIAL?

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Mind, Brain and Language: How Are Human Beings Special?

Subject Code

GE - Gateway Education

Course Number

1132

Academic Unit

Linguistics and Translation (LT)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

GE Area (Primary)

Area 1 - Arts and Humanities

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

The course looks at the relation between language and the human mind/brain. In particular, it studies properties of natural language as parts of a self-contained abstract system and how it is related to the physical human brain as well as to certain aspects of human cognition such as rationality, perceptual and computation capacity. It considers the extent to which individual cognition bears on cultural values of a community and how language expresses those values. Upon completion of the course, the students would understand themselves and the community they are a part of better and be able to interact with each other in a meaningful way.

Apart from selected readings from textbooks and articles, the students would have a chance to work together in small groups on questionnaires polling opinions of human subjects about specific problems. To ensure individual merits, quizzes and written assignments will be given.

Course Aims

This course aims to expose the students to different areas of human cognition connected with rationality, perception, information processing, computation and language. Issues of particular interest of the course are (i) how language is related to the way we approach problems and make choices, (ii) how language is affected by our perception of the world and the consequences for the way we respond to it and (iii) what properties of natural language, as parts of a self-contained abstract system, are related to the physical brain, and (iv) how different cultural values are reflected in language.

The course is interdisciplinary in that it bears on the biological, psychological, linguistic and social aspects of the human life. Understanding these various issues helps us see who we are as human beings and how we interact with each other as a community.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Evaluate the role language plays in our daily life in approaching problems, possible solutions and the decision- making process.		x	x	
2	Discuss how cognitive constraints limit our perception of the world and shape our cultural values as well as how to get around the limitations.		x	x	
3	Make use of the methodology for conducting polling opinions of human subjects.			x	x
4	Describe the cross-cultural similarities and differences, and interact with people in a meaningful way.			x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Readings	Students will engage with selected readings from textbooks and articles.	1, 2, 4	
2	Lectures	Students will engage with the lecture activities that introducing problems and issues, analysis of possible solutions with particular examples, drawing general conclusions.	1, 2, 4	
3	Peer discussion	Students will participate in discussions to complete in-class exercises and activities that require them to apply concepts learnt in lectures to analyse new data and problems.	1, 2, 3, 4	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Ten in-class exercises and activities	1, 2, 3, 4	15	The exercises and activities are to encourage class participation and verify students' understanding and attention to classes. Students can use GenAI tools to brainstorm, gather information, solve problems, and edit language. Students should give proper acknowledgment to all the content from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the exercises. Students should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes

2	One written assignment (students summarize and express their individual opinions about additional readings)	1, 2, 4	25	Students can use GenAI tools to brainstorm, gather information, solve problems, format references, and edit language. Students should give proper acknowledgment to all the content from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the assignment and keep a journal of their GenAI conversations. Students should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes
3	One in-class midterm comprehensive quiz (90 minutes) 30%	1, 2, 4	30	This is a summative assessment task.	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

70

Examination (%)

30

Examination Duration (Hours)

1.5

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

1. In-class exercises and activities

Criterion

Demonstrate the ability to critically discuss and analyse fundamental issues in language, language use, inter- cultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Demonstrate excellent coherent group work in collecting data, critically discussing and analysing fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Demonstrate good coherent group work in collecting data, critically discussing and analysing fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Demonstrate adequate group work in collecting data, critically discussing and analysing some fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Marginal (D)

Show little coherent group work in collecting data, inadequate discussion and analysis of fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Failure (F)

Show virtually no coherent group work in collecting data, inadequate discussion and analysis of fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Assessment Task

2. Written assignment

Criterion

Demonstrate the ability to critically discuss and analyse fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Demonstrate excellent ability to critically discuss and analyse fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Demonstrate good ability to critically discuss and analyse fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Demonstrate adequate ability to discuss and analyse fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Marginal (D)

Show little ability to discuss and analyse fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Failure (F)

Show virtually no ability to discuss and analyse fundamental issues in language, language use, intercultural communication as well as the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Assessment Task

3. In-class midterm quiz

Criterion

Demonstrate understanding of basic concepts in the study of language discussed in class, discussing briefly some fundamental issues in language use and its relation to some other aspects of cognition such as perception as well as to culture.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Demonstrate excellent understanding of basic concepts in the study of language discussed in class, discussing briefly some fundamental issues in language use and its relation to some other aspects of cognition such as perception as well as to culture.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Demonstrate good understanding of basic concepts in the study of language discussed in class, discussing briefly some fundamental issues in language use and its relation to some other aspects of cognition such as perception as well as to culture.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Demonstrate adequate understanding of basic concepts in the study of language discussed in class, discussing briefly some fundamental issues in language use and its relation to some other aspects of cognition such as perception as well as to culture.

Marginal (D)

Show little understanding of basic concepts in the study of language discussed in class, discussing briefly some fundamental issues in language use and its relation to some other aspects of cognition such as perception as well as to culture.

Failure (F)

Show virtually no understanding of basic concepts in the study of language discussed in class, discussing briefly some fundamental issues in language use and its relation to some other aspects of cognition such as perception as well as to culture.

Assessment Task

4. Examination

Criterion

Demonstrate understanding of the fundamental issues in intercultural communication, the formal and cultural differences between languages, and basic concepts involved in analysing our language.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Demonstrate excellent understanding of the fundamental issues in intercultural communication, the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Demonstrate good understanding of the fundamental issues in intercultural communication, the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Demonstrate adequate understanding of the fundamental issues in intercultural communication, the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Marginal (D)

Show little understanding of the fundamental issues in intercultural communication, the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Failure (F)

Show virtually no understanding of the fundamental issues in intercultural communication, the formal and cultural differences between languages.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

brain, cognition, computation, cultural values, decision-making, natural language, perception, problem-solving, rationality.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Bloom, Paul and Frank Keil. 2001. Thinking through language. <i>Mind & Language</i> 16, 351-367.
2	Jackendoff, Ray. 1996. How language helps us think. <i>Pragmatics & Cognition</i> , Vol. 4(1), pp. 1-34.
3	Lund, Nick. 2003. <i>Language and thought</i> . Routledge.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Boroditsky, L. 2001. Does language shape thought? Mandarin and English speakers' conception of time. <i>Cognitive psychology</i> 43, 1-22.
2	Myers, David. 2011. <i>Psychology</i> , 10th edition, Worth Publishers.
3	Pinker, Stephen. 1995. <i>The language instinct</i> . HarperCollins.
4	Online Resources: Video clips from academic institutions.

Annex (for GE courses only)

A. Please specify the Gateway Education Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) that the course is aligned to and relate them to the CILOs stated in Part II, Section 2 of this form:

Please indicate which CILO(s) is/are related to this PILO, if any (can be more than one CILOs in each PILO)

PILO 1: Demonstrate the capacity for self-directed learning

1, 2, 4

PILO 2: Explain the basic methodologies and techniques of inquiry of the arts and humanities, social sciences, business, and science and technology

1, 3, 4

PILO 3: Demonstrate critical thinking skills

1, 2, 4

PILO 4: Interpret information and numerical data

1, 3, 4

PILO 5: Produce structured, well-organised and fluent text

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 6: Demonstrate effective oral communication skills

3

PILO 7: Demonstrate an ability to work effectively in a team

3

PILO 8: Recognise important characteristics of their own culture(s) and at least one other culture, and their impact on global issues

4

PILO 9: Value ethical and socially responsible actions

1, 2, 4

PILO 10: Demonstrate the attitude and/or ability to accomplish discovery and/or innovation

1, 2, 3, 4

B. Please select an assessment task for collecting evidence of student achievement for quality assurance purposes. Please retain at least one sample of student achievement across a period of three years.

Selected Assessment Task

Individual written assignments: students will be asked to read additional literature and express their own opinions on particular problems and issues.

CILO: 1,2 and 4

PILO: 1-5, 8-10