Course Description
Oana David

Course Title:
Researching Metaphor: A Qualitative and Quantitative Introduction

In this course we will take a survey of the study of the relationship between overt, explicit linguistic forms and unconscious thought. We will use theoretical and empirical insights that span the fields of linguistics, philosophy, cognitive science, and psychology. The focus is on uncovering the meanings in metaphoric expressions – such as ‘fiscal cliff’, ‘war on terror’ and ‘tax relief’ – in common news, blog and social media discourse, and analyze how the metaphors operate on reader’s interpretation of the social issues being discussed.

There is an empirical component to this course, providing training in basic methodological tools to perform corpus analysis and data mining for information about deeper meanings in texts, such as viewpoint, bias, and metaphorically-driven framing of political and social views. The goal is to learn how unconscious conceptual metaphoric mappings operate beneath the surface linguistic form, and how to methodologically dissect these meanings to get at author’s intentions and assumptions.

A secondary but important goal is to become proficient in basic computational analytic tools and methods needed to perform such analyses in an efficient and precise manner. We will use these theoretical and methodological tools to find conceptual order in the chaos of the large amounts of data facing us every day.

Theoretical questions we will be addressing include:

- What is conceptual metaphor, and how do particular language-specific and universal metaphors help structure our worldview? How do frames and cultural models work with metaphors to help this structuring?
- Does thought influence language, and vice versa, and if so, to what extent? Do metaphors ‘translate’ across languages? Is there systematicity in cross-linguistic similarities and differences?
- How do people categorize and experience the world around them (e.g., what is a ‘color’ in the real world), and further, how do they categorize abstract notions like ‘love’ and ‘democracy’?

To tackle these and other questions, we will need to closely examine the most important tools in the cognitive linguist’s toolkit – metaphor, metonymy, categorization and prototype structure, embodiment, gesture, perspective and viewpoint, neurally-based simulation and imagination, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, cultural concepts and framing, and the cognitive foundations of grammar.

Course outcomes

- Students will receive a theoretical foundation in cognitive linguistics and principles in cognitive science relevant to the study of language. Linguistic concepts are presented in the context of this broader dialogue, and language is presented as one integral component of the fabric of cognition.
- Students will acquire skills in corpus linguistic research, including small-scale data mining, performing concordances, strategic searching using regular expressions and keywords, data structure design and tagging, and working with corpora in languages other than English.
- Students will use their theoretical grounding and corpus methodology to develop and answer brief research questions in the form of short essays or one final research paper.

Readings

Additional readings


Regier, T., & Kay, P. (2009). Language, thought, and color: Whorf was half right. Trends in cognitive sciences, 13(10), 439-446.


