



Speech: A window into the developing mind

**Advanced psychology seminar
(V89.0300-005 or G89.3403-001)**

Humans communicate using speech; we do this quickly, automatically, and effortlessly. Speech is more than just sound; it communicates specific meanings, and mental states. In this seminar, we'll consider how young infants use speech in order to learn about their world. Specifically, speech will be examined as a linguistic, communicative and social signal for infants. Ultimately, you'll become familiar with crucial questions in early development through reading current papers on speech.

Instructor: Athena Vouloumanos

Time: Tuesdays 10-11:50 am

Place: Meyer Psychology Building, Room 307

Office: Meyer Psychology Building, Room 308

Office hours: by appointment

Contact: athena.vouloumanos@nyu.edu

Prerequisites: A strong background in at least one (preferably more) of the following: cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, biology and/or linguistics. Open to graduate students and advanced undergraduates with a suitable background.

Readings: Current and seminal articles selected from psychology and linguistics journals. All reading materials will be made available through the course website on Blackboard.

Course requirements and evaluation: Students will delve into topics of interest through discussion, in-class presentations and a research proposal. Grades will be based on participation in class discussions (30%), presenting some of the weekly readings (30%), and the writing (25%) and presentation (15%) of a 10-page original research proposal on a topic of interest. There is no provision for additional work in this seminar.

Class Participation 30%

Aims & Evaluation:

- Share ideas, try out ideas, and practice public speaking.
- 2, 1 or 0 pts per class. 2 pts for both intelligent and collegial participation and posting a thoughtful comment on the class discussion board; 1 pt for intelligent and collegial participation, or a thoughtful posting on the discussion board; 0 for silence or nonsensical comments.
- Presenting articles and leading discussions does not count toward participating. The point is to contribute to the general discussion.

Article presentation and leading class discussion 30%

Aims & Evaluation:

- Practice presenting a paper; pulling out essential and important information and explaining it to others.
- Practice critiquing a paper
- Practice jump-starting a discussion by introducing 1-2 questions/thoughts or relaying an interesting posting on the discussion board.
- Based on insightful comments and success at leading discussion and handing questions.

Presentation format:

- Informal presentation and discussion with or without PowerPoint. PowerPoint is not necessary (if you use it, please refer to the guidelines below)

Presentation content:

- Who are the authors?
- What did authors ask and do?
- What did they find?
- What do they think the findings mean? What do they argue about the implications?

Proposal presentation 15%

Aims & Evaluation:

- Practice giving short, formal, timed oral presentation on your original ideas.
- Clear, concise, comprehensible. Effective use of PowerPoint.
- Respond succinctly and appropriately to questions and challenges. Thinking on your feet.

Presentation format:

- Build your presentation in PowerPoint; Keep text to a minimum; Illustrations can speak volumes.
- Put your file on a USB key, or attach it in email to me before class. If you include movies or sounds, include these files in a folder so that your movies remain animated in your presentation.
- Presentations will be timed (10 minutes). After 10 minutes, the fat lady sings. Practice the timing.
- There will be a question period (5 minutes) during which other seminar participants will challenge your proposal.

Presentation content:

- What is the phenomenon/question that grabbed your interest?
- What have others done around this phenomenon/question?
- What is your original question?
- How do you propose to test this?
- What do you think your findings would mean? What are their implications?

This is a lot to cram in 10 minutes – think of this as an exercise in formulating an argument: the essential stays; the less relevant or unnecessary detail goes.

Proposal 25%

Aims & Evaluation:

- To succinctly review the literature on a specific question of interest. To propose a follow-up experiment that is motivated by prior work, but novel and creative.
- All in 10 double spaced pages.

Proposal format and content:

Brevity is the soul of wit. -*Shakespeare*

- A literature review (4-5 pages) including between 10 and 15 references. A couple of review papers or theoretical papers are appropriate.
- A proposal for a new experiment on infant speech perception. (4-5 pages)
- Predictions and implications (1 page).
- APA is mandatory (you're adults now).

Overview of Topics

Date	Week	Topic
22-Jan	1	introductions
29-Jan	2	what is speech?
5-Feb	3	do infants have biases for listening to and processing speech?
12-Feb	4	how do speech sounds become units of language? I (phonetics/phonology)
19-Feb	5	how do speech sounds become units of language? II (perceptual tuning)
26-Feb	6	are infant learning mechanisms tuned to speech?
4-Mar	7	how do infants use speech to organise their conceptual world? I (categorization)
11-Mar	8	how do infants use speech to organise their conceptual world? II (individuation)
16-Mar	Spring Break – No Class	
25-Mar	9	how do infants use speech to organise their social world?
1-Apr	10	can speech give insight into other minds?
8-Apr	11	what do infants understand about the conventional nature of speech?
15-Apr	12	how is speech represented in the infant brain?
22-Apr	13	what can infant productions tell us about their understanding of speech?
29-Apr	14	proposal presentations

(readings coming soon)