

Language, Brain, and Society

Ken Bleile
Fall Semester, 2026

Introduction

Almost as soon as we wake up, words start tumbling from our mouths, one after another. Words pour from us throughout the day, stopping only at night when we fall asleep, after which the electrical representation of words may tumble out in dreams. In any single day, we use these words to -among much else- chat, discuss, palaver, share, hold forth, mutter, shout, address, expound, amuse, insinuate, explain, question, demand, suggest, and digress.

The topic of this seminar is language, brain, and society. We begin each class period with a discussion of the neurology of learning. In the second part of the class period, we travel to another planet, where we, the diverse inhabitants of that world, build our species' brains, languages and societies. Through our discussion of brain development and our world-building we seek to better understand *What is language? What is the basis of language in the brain? What roles does language play in societies? How is human language similar and different from that of other species?*

Course Objectives

My hope is that on completing this course you will:

- Better understand connections between language, brain, and society
- Learn about the brain through the study of 7 real children
- Discover more about language, brain, and society by building those things yourself

Business Matters

We meet on Mondays from 3:00 to 4:50 p.m. Our classroom is Bartlett 3021. The course has two midterms and a final exam. Each midterm is an oral presentation on topics discussed in class. The final exam is a group presentation comparing your species to humans. If you are dissatisfied with an exam grade, you may retake the exam to earn a higher grade.

Key Dates

Semester begins: August 24th

Holiday: September 7th

1st Examination: October 5th

2nd Examination: November 16th

Fall Break: November 23rd-27th

Final Examination: 3:00-4:50 p.m. Monday, December 14th

Weekly Schedule

Introduction

Week 1	Welcome	August 24th
Week 2	Meet the family	August 31st
Week 3	--	September 7th

Building Brain Architecture

Week 4	<i>Born too soon and too small</i>	September 14 th
Week 5	<i>Silent and afraid</i>	September 21 st
Week 6	<i>Please, don't judge me</i>	September 28 th
Week 7	First Examination	October 5 th

Recovery and Resilience

Week 8	<i>A Family secret</i>	October 12 th
Week 9	<i>The Boy who fell over</i>	October 19 th
Week 10	<i>The Crash Reel- part 1</i>	October 26 th
Week 11	<i>The Crash Reel- part 2</i>	November 2 nd
Week 12	<i>The Crash Reel- Part 3</i>	November 9th
Week 13	Second Examination	November 16th
Fall Break		November 23rd-27th
Week 14	<i>She's just shy, that's all</i>	November 30th
Week 15	Wrapping up	December 7th

University Statements

<https://provost.uni.edu/syllabus-statements>