What does the structure of language, and our ability to acquire it, reveal about the human mind? How does the structure of language and the particular languages we know influence the way in which we think about and categorize the non-linguistic world around us? These are questions that extend back to antiquity in the philosophical domain. Yet, sitting back in an armchair using a mixture of self-reflection and preconceived doctrines is hardly the best method for answering such questions. Instead, we will look at a wide range of empirical work in linguistics and cognitive science that at least begins to show us how to answer these questions. Topics will include whether knowledge of language arises from interaction between linguistic experience and a domain-specific learning mechanism admitting of a limited range of parameter-settings (UG) or from general learning mechanisms; the extent to which human concepts precede or antecede the acquisition of language; and the relationship of language to spatial cognition, numerical knowledge, and counterfactual reasoning.

Format: All readings will be posted on Blackboard. Students are responsible for completing all readings for the week prior to seminar meetings, and for enough mastery of the readings to contribute to a fruitful two-hour discussion of it. Instructors will preview the following week's material in the final hour of the seminar.

Requirements: Discussion-leading in groups, graded (10%). Regular, graded short writing assignment (about five total) (30%). Final research paper of your choosing (50%). Regular, quality participation in discussion (10%).
Reading Schedule

Week 1: Jan. 27th The Universal Grammar Model

Week 2: Feb. 3rd Arguments for UG


Week 3: Feb. 10th Evidence from Signing and Creoles


Week 4: Feb. 17th Arguments and evidence against UG & POS


Week 5: Feb. 24th **Empirical evidence against UG & POS**


(Optional: “Language and Cognition” in preparation for Carruthers’ Feb. 25 talk, see Week 8.)

Week 6: Mar. 3rd **Alternatives to UG models of language learning**


Spring Break
Week 7: Mar. 24th **Language and Meaning**


**March 26th**: Paul Kockelman talk, 6pm Taylor 203.

Week 8: Mar. 31st **Language’s Role in Cognition**
Short Writing Assignment Due.


Week 9: Apr. 7th **Language and Numerical Cognition**
Short Writing Assignment Due.


indigene group with a reduced number lexicon. Science 306. 499 - 503.


April 10th: Final Project Source List Due.

Week 10: Apr. 14th Language and Counterfactual Reasoning


Week 11: Apr. 21st Language, Objects, and Spatial Cognition


**April 24th**: Final Project Revised Source List and Annotations Due.

Week 12: Apr. 28th **More on Language and Spatial Cognition**


**April 29th**: Barbara Landau talk.

**Week 13: May 5th** **Final Seminar**

**May 12th**: Final Projects Due.

*Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with the Office of Disability and Support Services. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with us early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course which have been approved by the Office of Disability and Support Services, as indicated in your DSS accommodation letter.*