Aliyar Ozercan

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Research Profile

My research is in the philosophy of cognitive science and the philosophy of psychology. I focus on how psychological, developmental, and neurocognitive methods constrain theories of mind and language. A central strand of my work is *infant philosophy of mind*: I use developmental evidence (roughly 0–5 years) to clarify what early social cognition reveals about the structure of mindreading, the role of affect in social understanding, and the evidential standards for attributing mental states. I develop computational and formally explicit models (including decision-theoretic and logical tools) that connect philosophical hypotheses about mental-state attribution to measurable signatures in infant behavior and learning, and I use these models to sharpen empirical contrasts across experimental paradigms, corpus methods, and neurocognitive evidence. My current research program investigates the early development of emotion understanding as a foundation for later mindreading. I have worked as a neuroimaging research assistant (fMRI analysis), published a *Symbolic Logic Manual*, and edited *Language, Logic, and Empirical Knowledge: Collected Papers of Teo Grünberg*. I received UConn's Provost's Teaching Excellence Award and have taught 16 sections (with 14 additional as a TA).

Areas of Specialization and Competence

AOS: Philosophy of Cognitive Science; Philosophy of Psychology; Philosophy of Mind.
AOC: Philosophy and Neurobiology of Language; Epistemology; Logic.

Education

University of Connecticut (UConn) — 2018 – 2025
Ph.D. in Philosophy — *Storrs, CT*
- Dissertation: "The Sub-Theories of Mind"
- Chair: William G. Lycan; Committee: Jonathan Phillips, Mitchell Green, Richard Moore

University of Connecticut (UConn) — 2019 – 2025
Graduate Certificates (Ph.D. Minors) — *Storrs, CT*
- Neurobiology of Language
- Cognitive Science
- Logic

University of Connecticut (UConn) — 2018 – 2020
M.A. in Philosophy — *Storrs, CT*

Middle East Technical University (METU) — 2013 – 2016
M.A. in Philosophy — *Ankara, Turkey*
- Thesis: "The Maxims of Relevance Theory for Determining the Referent of a Proper Name"
- Chair: Teo Grünberg; Committee: David Grünberg, Sandy Berkovski

Middle East Technical University (METU) — 2009 – 2013
B.A. in Philosophy — *Ankara, Turkey*

Publications

Book: *Symbolic Logic Manual*. Aliyar Ozercan. METU Press, Ankara, 2014. 196 pp.

Edited Volume: *Language, Logic, and Empirical Knowledge: Collected Papers of Teo Grünberg (1965–2005)*. Editors: D. Grünberg and Aliyar Ozercan. METU Press, Ankara, 2017. 196 pp.

Revise and Resubmit

1. Emotion-First Mindreading in Infancy: A Theory of Emotion (R&R at *Mind & Language*)
Philosophy of Mind, Developmental Psychology, Cognitive Science
- Argues that a domain-specific "Theory of Emotion" is an early form of mindreading, outlining a developmental ladder from resonance to practical metarepresentation, and integrates evidence from comforting, social referencing, and early humor.

2. Representation of the Unknown: A Theory of Indefinite Targeting (R&R at *Synthese*)
Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Science
- Explains how inquiry can target an unknown by introducing "indefinite targeting," a formal representational scheme that supports adaptive investigation despite faulty starts (e.g., the Vulcan case).

Papers under review

1. Proto-Social Cognition: A Relational Framework for Infant Sociality (Under review)
Cognitive Science, Developmental Psychology, Philosophy of Mind
- Argues that infants' earliest social system manages live interaction (not state inference) via a "who-does-what-to-what" controller; explains existing findings on contingency and integration while making new, falsifiable predictions about anticipatory looking and partner-scaled re-engagement bids.

2. Helping Without Beliefs: Teleological Alignment in Early Instrumental Helping (Under review)
Developmental Psychology, Philosophy of Mind, Cognitive Science
- Argues that the canonical toddler helping profile (selectivity, targeting, efficiency) can be generated by a belief-free predictive control architecture, *Teleological Alignment*, which tracks publicly available goal structure and objective constraints, treats disruption as mismatch, and treats intervention as completion-based repair, without presupposing moral concern or shared commitment.

3. Beyond Belief: A Criterion Reading of Dennett's Standard for Mindreading (Under review)
Philosophy of Mind, Epistemology, Cognitive Science
- Proposes a "criterion reading" of Dennett's (1978) standard on which the belief benchmark is sufficient but not necessary, and sketches a model-comparison program for testing early emotion-reading against that standard.

4. Emotion Reading as Mindreading in Infancy: A Complexity-Cost Criterion (Under review)
Developmental Psychology, Experimental Philosophy, Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience
- Develops a belief-free evidential standard for infant mindreading and applies it to emotion-domain paradigms (emotion–goal conflict, convergent comforting, active probing) with explicit falsifiers and pre-registered style quality checks.

5. Reference Alignment and Repair as Optimal Control (Under review)
Philosophy of Language, Pragmatics, Philosophy of Cognitive Science
- Models reference alignment as cost-sensitive control under uncertainty: a listener maintains a distribution over candidate targets and selects among *Wait*, *Ground*, *Guess*, and *LetGo* via a POMDP, predicting clarification behavior across stakes, costs, cue informativeness, and cognitive load.

6. Scaling the Force of Assertion: Turkish *-mIş* (Under review)
Philosophy of Language, Semantics, Pragmatics
- Presents a speech-act account of Turkish *-mIş* as a device that weakens assertoric force while keeping truth-conditional content fixed, supporting the analysis with a range of discourse diagnostics (e.g., challenge profile, retraction style).

Papers in preparation

1. Reconciling Knowing and Doing: A Dual-Representation Model for Infancy (In preparation)
Epistemology, Cognitive Development, Philosophy of Psychology
- Addresses the 'knowledge-action dissociation' in infancy. Proposes a conceptual model of two distinct, competing representational systems: a pragmatic system for action-guidance and an epistemic system for perceptual tracking, each with different developmental timelines.

2. Social Representation Under Uncertainty and Linguistic Evidence (In preparation)
Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, Social Cognition
- Treats social understanding as uncertainty reduction over time, where linguistic cues and interaction guide when children maintain, revise, or suspend representations of others' goals and commitments; outlines discriminating predictions for active probing and repair.

3. Effects of Reward in Alzheimer's (Data Analysis Finished)
Neuroimaging, Cognitive Neuropsychology, Cognitive Neuroscience (Collaborative project)
- Task-based fMRI study probing reward sensitivity in Alzheimer's disease; final cohort data analysis.
- Contribution: Led end-to-end fMRI data analysis from raw to group level: BIDS curation; preprocessing; quality control and motion handling; slice-timing, coregistration, normalization, and smoothing; first-level modeling with ROI and whole-brain analyses in FSL and AFNI; mixed-effects group statistics and reporting.

AFFILIATIONS AND VISITING POSITIONS

Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences (IBACS) 2021 – present
Fellow and Affiliated Researcher *Storrs, CT*

Expression, Communication, and Origins of Meaning (ECOM) Research Group 2018 – 2024
Manager and Affiliated Researcher *Storrs, CT*

University of California, Davis 2015 – 2016
Visiting Scholar in Philosophy *Davis, CA*

Boğaziçi University 2016 – 2018
Ph.D. Coursework in Philosophy (transferred to UConn) *Istanbul, Turkey*

Harvard University 2011
Graduate Coursework and Research *Cambridge, MA*

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Group Manager 2018 – 2024
University of Connecticut, Expression, Communication, and Origins of Meaning (ECOM) *Storrs, CT*
- Co-organized ten international, interdisciplinary conferences connecting philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and neuroscience. Keynote speakers included:
  - *Expression, Language, Music 2* (2024): Ani Patel; Paul Boghossian; Philippe Schlenker
  - *Kinds of Consciousness* (2024): Jonathan Birch; Elizabeth Schechter
  - *Millikanfest* (2023): François Recanati; David Papineau; Robyn Carston; Josh Armstrong; Dan Dennett
  - *Kinds of Action* (2023): Lucy O'Brien; John Schwenkler
  - *Expression, Language, Music* (2022): Tecumseh Fitch; Kathleen Higgins; Ray Jackendoff; Jerrold Levinson; Isabelle Peretz
  - *Expression, Language, Music* (scheduled 2021; postponed to 2022)
  - *Kinds of Mindreading* (2021): Jonathan Phillips; Helen Tager-Flusberg
  - *Kinds of Knowledge* (2020): Alex Byrne; Kristin Andrews
  - *Communication, Context, Conversation* (2019): Robyn Carston; Danielle Matthews; Mandy Simons
- Hosted and facilitated 55 invited talks; coordinated speaker series, schedules, publicity, and post-talk research networking across departments.

- Invited speakers included William Snyder; Letty Naigles; Robyn Carston; Disa Sauter; Ani Patel; Peter Gärdenfors; Richard Moore; Jonathan Prather; Crispin Wright; Emily Myers; Peter Langland-Hassan; Cameron Buckner; Jill de Villiers; and others.
- Secured internal and external funding through grant writing and resource coordination; managed budgets and reporting for ECOM events.

IBACS Fellowship (NIH/NSF Grant-Writing Program) 2022
Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences (IBACS) *Storrs, CT*
- Awarded a $5,000 competitive fellowship for graduate research in Brain and Cognitive Sciences.
- Completed a grant-writing program focused on NIH F31/F32 proposals; drafted Specific Aims and core sections with faculty feedback.
- Served on a mock NIH review panel; training in evaluation criteria for NSF GRFP and NRSA proposals.

Research Assistant in Neuroimaging 2019 – 2021
IBACS (Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences) and BIRC (Brain Imaging Research Center) *Storrs, CT*
- Managed and preprocessed multimodal neuroimaging data (fMRI, EEG) using BIDS apps and established pipelines (fMRIPrep, XCP Engine).
- Performed quality control and artifact handling, including motion correction, slice timing, coregistration, normalization, and spatial smoothing.
- Analyzed task-based and resting-state fMRI data using FSL (FEAT) and AFNI; conducted ROI and whole-brain analyses; integrated FreeSurfer-based anatomy.
- Computed connectivity metrics (seed-based correlation, ICA, ALFF) and network-level interactions across subjects; contributed to multivariate analyses for cognitive and clinical projects.
- Programmed cognitive tasks for fMRI and EEG using PsychoPy and Python for adult and clinical populations.
- Developed reusable documentation and Python scripts supporting automated analysis pipelines and lab-wide task deployment.
- Training and support: MRI/EEG hardware operation, safety protocols, participant preparation, and scanner-session troubleshooting (stimulus setup, bookings coordination).

Research Assistant 2014 – 2016
METU, Laboratory for Computational Ontology *Ankara, Turkey*
- Contributed to "In Pursuit of the Missing Premise," on foundational gaps in models of reasoning.
- Formalized philosophical accounts of agency into computable representations: ontologies for agents, actions, goals, and epistemic constraints; class hierarchies and relational schemas; test queries for inferences and defeaters.
- Developed rule- and belief-update specifications supporting prototype agent-based reasoning systems.

INVITED TALKS

"Prepositional Minds," Department of Philosophy Colloquium, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, February 2024

"Sub-Theories of Mind," Cognitive Science Research Club, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, December 2023

"Sub-Theories of Mind," Department of Psychology Seminar, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey, December 2023

"How to Beat Dr. Frankenstein?," Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences (IBACS), University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, October 2020

"Evidentiality and Its Challenge to Propositional Theories," Boğaziçi Linguistics Circle, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey, December 2019

"Indexicality of Proper Names," Altmann Lab Talk, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, September 2019

PRESENTATIONS

"Representations, Descriptions, and Prepositional Attitudes in Animals" at International Society for the Philosophy of the Sciences of the Mind (ISPSM), December 2023

"Beyond Belief" at XII Edition Workshop of Philosophy of Biology & Cognitive Sciences, November 2023, University of Málaga, Spain

"Sub-Theories of Mind," November 2023, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

"Representations, Descriptions, and Prepositional Attitudes in Animals" at 14th Annual Northwestern/Notre Dame Graduate Epistemology Conference, May 2023, Northwestern University, Illinois

"Third-Person to First-Person: Understanding Others' Mental States" at First-Person Science of Consciousness Conference, May 2023, Witten/Herdecke University, Germany

"Descriptions, Representations, and Prepositional Attitudes in Animals," 73rd New Mexico-Texas Philosophical Society Meeting, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, Texas, April 2023

"Why would you say that?" October 2022, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

"How to satisfy your curiosity?" May 2022, IHPST Graduate Conference, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

"How to satisfy your curiosity?" April 2022, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

"Evidentiality and Its Challenge to Propositional Theories," December 2020, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

"Animal Curiosity," October 2019, Bleen Conference, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

"Bir Hatanın Peşinde" (In Pursuit of a Mistake) December 2017, 2nd METU Philosophy Graduate Students Conference, METU, Ankara, Turkey

"Dinleyici İçin Kurallar" (The Maxims of the Audience) May 2016, 1st METU Philosophy Graduate Students Conference, METU, Ankara, Turkey

"In Pursuit of the Missing Premise," co-authored with O. Akçelik, September 2015, British Logic Colloquium, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK

Awards, Fellowships, and Grants

UConn Doctoral Fellowships (3 awards; total $4,750)	2019, 2023
ELM Fellowships (3 awards; total $4,600)	2020, 2022, 2023
ECOM Research Fellowships (4 awards; total $4,500)	2019 – 2023
UConn Conference Award ($2,000)	2023
UConn Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship ($2,500)	2022
IBACS and BIRC Fellowships (3 awards; total $15,000)	2020 – 2022
Provost's Teaching Excellence Award	2019
Visiting Research Grant to UC Davis ($5,000)	2015
Laboratory for Computational Ontology Research Grant ($1,000)	2015
Akbank Research Project Contest Winner ($100,000)	2012

Teaching Experience

Principal Instructor (16 sections)

Neuropsychology | *4 sections*   Summers 2022, 2023, 2024
Phillips Academy Andover

Social Psychology | *2 sections*   Summers 2022 and 2024
Phillips Academy Andover

Philosophy and Logic | *1 section*   Spring 2024
UConn Stamford

Philosophy and Social Ethics | *5 sections*   2020 – 2023
UConn Storrs; UConn Hartford; UConn Waterbury
- Sections taught: Waterbury (Fall 2023), Hartford (Spring 2023), Storrs (Summer 2021, Summer 2020).

Problems of Philosophy | *4 sections*   2021 – 2022
UConn Storrs; UConn Hartford; UConn Waterbury
- Sections taught: Waterbury (Fall 2022, Fall 2021), Storrs (Summer 2022), Hartford (Spring 2022).

History of Science | *1 section*   2017
Bartin University (Turkey)

Teaching Assistant (14 sections)

Philosophy and Logic | *2 sections*   Spring 2019
UConn Storrs

Problems of Philosophy | *4 sections*   Fall 2018
UConn Storrs

Introduction to Logic | *2 sections*   Fall 2017
Bartin University (Turkey)

Logic I | *2 sections*   Fall 2017
Bartin University (Turkey)

Logic II | *2 sections*   Spring 2018
Bartin University (Turkey)

Modern Logic I | *2 sections*   Spring 2013 and 2014
METU (Turkey)

Introduction to Logic | *2 sections*   Fall 2012 and 2013
METU (Turkey)

GRADUATE COURSES

Philosophy of Mind

- Mind and Consciousness – William Lycan (UConn)
- Philosophy of Curiosity – İlhan İnan (Boğaziçi University)
- Expressing and Saying – Dorit Bar-On (UConn)
- From Concepts to Event Representation – Gerry Altmann (UConn)

Cognitive Neuroscience and Research Methods

- Foundations in Neuropsychology – John Salamone and Deborah Fein (UConn)
- Foundations in Neurobiology of Language – Jim Magnuson (UConn)
- Structure, Acquisition, and Processing of Language – William Snyder (UConn)
- Cognitive Neuroscience of Language – Emily Myers and Nicole Landi (UConn)
- Neurobiology of Typical and Atypical Cognitive and Lang. Development – Letty Naigles and Inge-Marie Eigsti (UConn)
- Research Methods and Statistics for Cognitive Science – Murat Perit Cakir (audit) (METU)
- Neuroimaging Methods – Roeland Hancock (UConn)

Semantics and Philosophy of Language

- Semantics I – Magdalena Kaufmann (UConn)
- Semantics II – Magdalena Kaufmann (UConn)
- Advanced Semantics (Perspective) – Magdalena Kaufmann (UConn)
- Propositional Theories of Meaning in Philosophy of Language – Teo Grünberg (METU)
- Force and Content – Lionel Shapiro (UConn)
- Heretic Approaches to Natural Language Semantics – Hanti Lin (audit) (UC Davis)
- Vagueness – Adam Sennet (audit) (UC Davis)
- Non-Ideal Philosophy of Language – Lynne Tirrell (UConn)
- Events and Their Names – Sun Demirli (Boğaziçi University)

Technical Skills

Programming: Python

Developer Tools: Git; Docker; Visual Studio Code

Neuroimaging & Experimental: PsychoPy; BIDS Apps (fMRIPrep, MRIQC, XCP Engine); FSL; AFNI; FreeSurfer

Analysis & Modeling: GLM; functional connectivity (seed-based correlation, ICA, ALFF); mixed-effects group analysis; task design for fMRI and EEG

Grant Writing: NIH/NSF-style proposals; internal funding applications; LaTeX

Learning Management Systems (LMS): Canvas; Blackboard

References

Prof. Dr. William (Bill) Lycan
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