



## **Philosophy of Language (PHIL 30070)**

Third Level Module, Spring 2020

Tuesdays 14:00-14:50, A106 ART

Thursdays 14:00-14:50, ARD AA1

Instructor: **Dr Elmar Unnsteinsson**

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Office Hours: by appointment

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### **Module description**

This module is an examination of philosophical questions concerning thought, communication, and human language. What is the nature of meaning? How do words refer to things? What is the relationship between thought and language? Theories of meaning and communication will also be applied to other important topics, like the nature of hate speech, silencing, and lying or insincerity. Language and meaning became central topics in analytic philosophy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, making the philosophy of language crucial to understanding basic problems in metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind to this day. This course introduces students to key debates in contemporary philosophy of language, focusing on basic notions like meaning, reference, truth, speech acts, and non-literal or indirect speech (like metaphor, irony, and implicature).

### **Learning outcomes**

Students who successfully complete this course will have (1) a good grasp of the central issues in the philosophy of language, (2) engaged critically with some of the most important views and arguments in the field, and (3) developed skills and tools necessary to think independently and systematically about open questions and topics of current interest.

### **Assessment**

- Two essays, 85% together.
  - **First Essay** (40%, 2000 words): **Deadline March 24<sup>th</sup>**
  - **Second Essay** (45%, 3000 words): **Deadline April 30<sup>th</sup>**
- Participation in lectures and tutorials, and quizzes on Brightspace, 15%.

There will be assigned topics for the First Essay, but you can also suggest topics yourselves, but they must be approved by the Instructor. For the Second Essay students are encouraged to find their own topic, but we will make sure to provide plenty of ideas as well. There will be occasional quizzes on Brightspace, testing your understanding of the Main Readings, these will go toward your participation assessment. But attendance and participation in discussions will also be assessed.

## Readings

Readings are on Brightspace. Always make sure to read the Main Reading material, the rest is optional but highly recommended. There are a number of introductions to philosophy of language, which you might want to consult if you find parts of the primary readings hard-going. I recommend the following:

1. William Lycan (2019). *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
2. Herman Cappelen & Josh Dever. *Contemporary Introductions to Philosophy of Language*. Book series: *Context and Communication* (2016), *Puzzles of Reference* (2018), and *Bad Language* (2019).

### 1 Frege on Sense and Reference

Jan 21, 23

Main Reading

**Gottlob Frege**, 'On Sense and Reference'

Additional

**Jeff Speaks**, 'Frege's Theory of Reference,' 'Frege's Theory of Sense'

### 2 Russell's Theory of Descriptions

Jan 28, ~~30~~

Two meetings Jan. 28<sup>th</sup>, 13:00-13:50 in A105 and 14:00-14:50 in A106.

No class Jan. 30<sup>th</sup>.

Main Readings

**Bertrand Russell**, 'On Denoting,'

**Bertrand Russell**, 'Descriptions'

Additional

**Russell**, 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description'

**Speaks**, 'Russell's 'On Denoting',' 'The Mysterious 'Gray's Elegy'...'

### 3 Quine on Meaning and Analyticity

Feb 4, 6

Main Readings

**Willard Van Orman Quine**, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'

**Willard Van Orman Quine**, 'Ontological Relativity'

Additional

**Scott Soames**, 'Ontology, Analyticity, and Meaning'

### 4 New Theories of Reference: Kripke and Putnam

Feb 11, 13

Main Readings

**Saul Kripke**, *Naming and Necessity* (excerpts)

**Hilary Putnam**, 'Meaning and Reference'

Additional

**Peter Strawson**, 'On Referring'

### 5 Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference

Feb 18, 20

Main Reading

**Saul Kripke**, 'Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference'

Additional

**Marga Reimer**, 'Donnellan's Distinction/Kripke's Test'

**Marga Reimer**, 'Three Views of Demonstrative Reference'

### 6 Natural and Nonnatural Meaning

Feb 25, 27

Main Readings

**Paul Grice**, 'Meaning'

**Thom Scott-Phillips**, *Speaking Our Minds*, Chapter 1

Additional

**Stephen Neale**, 'Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language' (Introduction, Sections 1, 4, 5, 6)

## 7 Speech Acts and Implicature

Mar 3, 5

Main Readings

**Paul Grice**, 'Logic and Conversation'

**J.L. Austin**, *How to do Things with Words*, Lectures 1-2, 8-9, 11-12

Additional

**Stephen Neale**, 'Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language' (Sections 2, 3)

**TWO WEEKS OFF**

## 8 Generative Linguistics

Mar 24, 26

Main Readings

**Noam Chomsky**, *Knowledge of Language*, Chapter 2, (try Chapter 1 too)

Additional

**Lila Gleitman & Elissa Newport**, 'The Invention of Language by Children'

**Robert Stainton**, 'A Deranged Argument Against Public Languages'

**First essay due on March 24, 2000 Words.**

## 9 Pragmatics and Metaphor

Mar 31, Apr 2

Main Readings

**Elizabeth Camp**, 'Metaphor and that Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi''

**Ernie Lepore & Matthew Stone**, 'Against Metaphorical Meaning'

Additional

**Deirdre Wilson & Robyn Carston**, 'A Unitary Approach to Lexical Pragmatics'

## 10 The Distinction between Lying and Misleading

Apr 7, 9

**Two meetings Apr. 7<sup>th</sup>, 13:00-13:50 (room to be announced) and 14:00-14:50 in A106. No class Apr. 9<sup>th</sup>**

Main Readings

**Jonathan Adler**, 'Lying, Deceiving, or Falsely Implicating'

**Jennifer Saul**, 'Dogwhistles, Political Manipulation, and Philosophy of Language'

## 11 Rae Langton on Silencing

Apr 14, 16

Main Readings

**Rae Langton**, 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts'

**Rae Langton & Caroline West**, 'Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game'

Additional

**David Lewis**, 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game'

## 12 Ishani Maitra on Silencing

Apr 21, 23

Main Reading

**Ishani Maitra**, 'Silencing Speech'

Additional

**Elmar Unnsteinsson**, 'Silencing without Convention'

**C. Thi Nguyen**, 'Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles'

**Second essay due on April 30, 3000 Words.**