



Philosophy of Language

Phil 234, Winter 2013

Bates College

Professor William Seeley (315 Hedge)

Office Hours: T/Th 11-Noon

Course Description: It has been argued that language is what sets us as human beings apart from our animal cousins. Language enables complex social interactions and facilitates the development of culture. It makes it possible for us to convey our thoughts, moods, and emotions to others. It also, arguably, is the tool that makes the contents of our own thoughts transparent to us. However we rarely reflect on what it is to be a language. What is a language? Do animals have language? If we came across beings from another planet could we tell if they had language? What is it that makes some sounds (or marks) meaningful and others not? What is it for a word or sound to represent, identify, or pick something out? How is it that we manage to express ourselves when we bark at each other (as the higher primates we are, after all) in speech? How is it that we can make sense of malapropisms, metaphors, and sentences that make reference to fabrications and fictional characters (or more technically, what is the relationship between meaning, truth, and reference)? In this course we will address these and a range of related questions about the nature of language through a philosophical lens. The course will be divided into three sections: *Referential Intentions and Animals Communication*; *Reference, Truth, & Meaning*; and *Thought, Language, & Conventions*.

Course Goals: The aim of this course is to 1) introduce students to some basic problems in the philosophy of language, by 2) working through philosophical discussions of the origin and nature of language, and 3) evaluating the relationship between language and thought.

Requirements: You will be asked to write a 3-page paper analyzing an argument from the syllabus material (20%), a 6-page mid-term paper synthesizing a range of arguments (30%), and an 8-page final paper (40%). You will be asked to choose between two or three assigned topics for each paper. The goal of these assignments is to encourage you to think through problems in the philosophy of language on your own. In addition I will administer 10 short reading quizzes during the course of the semester. The average of these quizzes will be worth 10% of your grade.

Attendance: *CLASS PARTICIPATION IS A REQUIREMENT* Attendance is a minimum requirement for student participation (and for passing the reading quizzes). If you miss 4 classes you have missed 1/6 of the semester! Excessive absences will affect a student's final grade approximate;y one +/- point on the letter grade scale.

Required Texts:

- A. P. Martinich, *The Philosophy of Language*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2001) (M).
- Readings on Lyceum. (*LYCEUM*)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

What follows is a provisional syllabus. It is likely that the reading schedule will change, as may the readings within it, as a result of class interest and time constraints. This flexibility will enhance our capacity to accommodate your interests. Make sure to check the syllabus weekly to keep track of any changes!

Topic 1: Referential Intentions & Animals Communication

Wynne	Talk to me (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
Evans	Cracking the code: communication and cognition in birds (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
Pepperberg	Cognitive and communicative abilities of grey parrots (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
Devitt & Sterelny	Syntax (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
Cheney and Seyfarth	Why animals don't have language? (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
<i>Recommended</i>	
Reznikova	Intelligent communication (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
Savage et al	Animal language: methodological and interpretive issues (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
Devitt & Sterelny	Thought and Meaning (<i>LYCEUM</i>)

Topic 2: Reference, Truth, & Meaning

Sense and Reference

Frege	On Sense & Nominatum (<i>M</i>)
Russell	On Denoting (<i>M</i>)
Russell	Descriptions (excerpt) (<i>M</i>)
Strawson	On Referring (<i>M</i>)
Donnellan	Reference & Definite Descriptions (<i>M</i>)
Searle	Proper Names (<i>M</i>)
Kripke	Naming and Necessity (<i>M</i>)
Putnam	Meaning & Reference (<i>M</i>)
Evans	The Causal Theory of Names (<i>M</i>)

Meaning and Truth

Grice	Meaning (<i>M</i>)
Davidson	Truth and Meaning (<i>M</i>)
Strawson	Meaning and Truth (<i>LYCEUM</i>)

Topic 3: Thought, Language, and Conventions

The Private Language Argument

Ayer	Could There Be A Private Language? (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
Kripke	Rules and Private Language (<i>M</i>)
Lewis	Language and Languages (<i>M</i>)

Language, essence, and intention

Bloom	Mind Reading, Communication, and Learning Names for Things (<i>LYCEUM</i>)
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ASSIGNMENTS:

First Paper – Please write a 3 page (900 word) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to stretch your philosophical legs, provide you with some feedback about the expectations of the class, and to evaluate your understanding of the course material. Treat this assignment as a short position paper. Take a position and defend it, give your reasons for holding that position, including whatever evidence you find relevant. However, please do not go beyond the syllabus readings. Whatever evidence you appeal to make sure it comes from these sources. The goal of this assignment is to build an argument, not to construct a research paper!

Paper Topic (1a): Some researchers have argued that animal language studies don’t hold out much promise. Evaluate attempts to teach primates artificial languages. What are the shortcomings of primate linguistic behavior? Do you share the skeptical view or are you more optimistic about non-human primate’s language abilities? Make sure to clearly identify the variables that influence, and the reasons you have for holding, your position

Paper Topic (1b): Are referential signals like the alarm calls of vervet monkeys and the food calls of sebright chickens analogous to language? What is at issue in this debate? Are there criteria that can help adjudicate between alternative hypotheses?

Due Date: 02/01/13 @ 5pm on LYCEUM and in hard copy in my mailbox.

Second Paper - Write a 6 page paper (1800 words) on one of two topics to be announced on the distribution date for the midterm. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this paper is twofold: a) to evaluate a standard argument in the literature; and b) to demonstrate that you can synthesize the material covered in the 1st half of the semester into a coherent position. Make sure to hand in an electronic copy in the 2nd *Paper Dropbox* on LYCEUM and a hard copy in the mailbox on my office door (#202) in 75 Campus Avenue.

Paper Topic (2a):

Paper Topic (2b):

Paper Topic (2c):

Due Date:

Third Paper – Write an 8 page paper (2400 words) on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this paper is twofold: a) to evaluate a standard argument in the literature; and b) to demonstrate that you can synthesize the material covered in the 1st half of the semester into a coherent position.

Paper Topic (3a):

Paper Topic (3b):

Paper Topic (3c):

Paper Topic (3d):

Topics Distributed:

Due Date:

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Topic 1: Animals & Humans

- Michael Devitt & Kim Sterelny (1999). "Introduction," *Language & Reality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 1-15.
- Christopher S. Evans (2002). "Cracking the Code: Communication and Cognition in Birds," in Marc Bekoff, Colin Allen, & Gordon M. Burghardt, *The Cognitive Animal: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives on Animal Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 315-321.
- Irene M. Pepperbeg (2002). "Cognitive and Communicative Abilities of Grey Parrots," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11(3), pp. 83-87.
- Clive D. L. Wynne (2004). "Talk to Me," *Do Animals Think* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp. 106-138.
- Dorothy L. Cheney and Robert M. Seyfarth, "Why Animals Don't Have Language," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Cambridge University, 1997. Retrieved January, 6, 2013: <http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Cheney98.pdf>
- Zhanna Reznikova (2000). "Intelligent Communication," *Animal Intelligence* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 321-360.

Supplemental

- * Sue Savage-Rumbaugh & Karen E. Brakke (1996). "Animal Language: Methodological & Interpretive Issues," In M. Bekoff and D. Jamieson. (eds.). *Readings in Animal Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 269-288.

Topic 2: Reference, Truth, & Meaning

- Gottlob Frege, "On Sense & Nominatum," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 35-47.
- Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 105-113.
- Bertrand Russell, "Descriptions," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 114-120.
- P. F. Strawson, "On Referring," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 121-135.
- Kieth Donnellan, "Reference and Definitive Descriptions," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 140-152.
- Saul Kripke, "Naming & Necessity," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 53-65.
- Hilary Putnam, "Meaning & Reference," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 66-73.
- Saul Kripke, "Naming & Necessity," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 74-85.
- Gareth Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 74-85.
- H. P. Grice, "Meaning," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 285-290.
- Donald Davidson, "Truth & Meaning," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 416-427.
- * P. F. Strawson, "Meaning and Truth," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 91-101.
- * J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 291-300.
- * John Searle, "What is a Speech Act," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 115-125.
- H. P. Grice, "Logic & Conversation," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 312-322.

Topic 3: Thought, Language, and Conventions

- A. J. Ayer, "Could There Be A Private Language," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 449-456.
- Saul Kripke, "On Rules & Private Language," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 546-558.

- * Ruth Garrett Milliken, "Truth Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 5th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 639-655.
- David Lewis, "Languages & Language," in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 682-700.
- Paul Bloom, "Mindreading, Communication, and the Learning of Names for Things," *Mind and Language*, 17(1-2, 2002): 17-54.

Date	Readings	Assignments
01/08	* Devitt & Sterelny, "Introduction," pp. 1-15 (<i>LYCEUM</i>)	
01/10	Evans, "Cracking the code: communication and cognition in birds," pp. 315-322 (<i>LYCEUM</i>) Pepperberg, "Cognitive and communicative abilities of grey parrots," pp. 83-87 (<i>LYCEUM</i>)	
01/15	Wynne, "Talk to me" pp. 106-138 (<i>LYCEUM</i>) * Reznikova, Intelligent Communication (<i>LYCEUM</i>)	
01/17	NO CLASS	
01/22	Cheney & Seyfarth, "Why animals don't..." pp. 175-199 (<i>LYCEUM</i>) Reznikova, "Animal intelligence," pp. (<i>LYCEUM</i>)	1 st paper topics issued
01/24	Frege, "On sense & reference," pp. 35-47 (<i>M</i>)	
01/29	Russell, "On denoting," pp. 105-113 (<i>M</i>)	
01/31	Russell, "Descriptions," pp. 114-120 (<i>M</i>)	First paper due: Feb 1 @ 5pm
02/05	Russell, "Descriptions," pp. 114-120 (<i>M</i>)	
02/07	Strawson, "On referring," pp. 121-135 (<i>M</i>)	
02/12	Donnellan, "Reference & definite descriptions," pp. 140-152 (<i>M</i>)	
02/14	Discussion Day	
02/16- 02/24	Winter Recess	
02/26	Searle, "Proper names," (<i>M</i>)	
02/28	Kripke, from <i>Naming and Necessity</i> (<i>M</i>)	
03/05	Putnam, "Meaning and reference" (<i>M</i>)	
03/07	Evans, "A causal theory of names," pp. 74-85 (<i>M</i>)	Second paper topics issued
03/12	Grice, "Meaning," pp. 285-290 (<i>M</i>)	
03/14	Austin, "Performative Utterances," pp. 291-300 (<i>M</i>)	
03/19	Davidson, "Truth and meaning," pp. 416-427 (<i>M</i>)	
03/21	Ayer, "Could there be a private language," pp. 449-456 (<i>LYCEUM</i>)	Second papers due @ 5pm in the usual way
03/26	Kripke, "On rules and private language," pp. 546-558 (<i>M</i>)	
03/28	NO CLASS	
04/02	Lewis, "Language and languages," pp. 682-700 (<i>M</i>)	
04/04	Bloom, "Mind reading," pp. 17-54 (<i>LYCEUM</i>)	

* = Supplemental