

PHIL 344: Philosophy of Language

Simon Fraser University, Fall 2012

Professor Endre Begby

Meeting times / places:

Mondays 14:30-16:20 WMC2202

Wednesdays 14:30-15:20 AQ4150

Contact Details:

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Office: WMC 5653

Office hours: Mondays 10:30–12:30, Thursdays 1:30-2:30.

Course Description:

This course will explore a series of important questions arising from philosophical reflection on language. How does linguistic communication work? What is the relation between language and self-conscious thought? Is language acquired or innate? Which, if any, aspects of language are universal? In what sense is language a social object, and in which sense a product of individual minds? Are there really such things as languages, as opposed to merely patterns of similarity in people's verbal behaviour?

While our guiding interests will be firmly philosophical and most of our readings will be culled from classic and contemporary philosophy, we will also be reading recent work in linguistics, psychology, and cognitive science.

Textbook:

None. All readings will be supplied by instructor.

Requirements:

- Participation – 15%
- Four précis of readings of your choice (2pp., or about 600 words each) – 40%

- Short paper (5-6 pp., or about 1500-1800 words) – 15%
- Research paper (8-10 pp., or about 2400-3000 words) – 30%
 - All students must submit abstract or outline of research paper at least two weeks prior to final submission date. The abstract / outline may be based on one of your précis.

Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to adhere to the SFU Academic Integrity Policy (available at <http://students.sfu.ca/academicintegrity/policy/index.html>). This is particularly important for written papers.

Cases of plagiarism will result in an automatic 0 points for the assignment, and an Academic Dishonesty report will be filed with the University. For especially egregious cases, students will be recommended for an FD grade (failure due to academic dishonesty) for the course. A single plagiarized sentence is sufficient to receive 0 points on an assignment. Students should familiarize themselves with what plagiarism is and how to avoid it at <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/tutorials/plagiarism-tutorial>.

Student Support:

For additional assistance, particularly for writing essays, please check <http://learningcommons.sfu.ca/> for tools, schedules for tutoring, and other services. If you require accommodation of some variety, please make sure you are registered with the SFU Centre for Students with Disabilities (<http://students.sfu.ca/disabilityaccess.html>), and notify me of the nature of those accommodations within the first two weeks of class.

Tentative schedule:

1: W 9/5 -- M 10/9

Plato, *Cratylus* (pp. 421-425)

Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* (p. 40)

John Locke, "Of Words" (pp. 621-623)

Thomas Reid, "Natural Language"

2: W 12/9 -- M 17/9

Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference" (pp. 209-214)

Gottlob Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry" (pp. 289-302; 307-311)

3: W 19/9 -- M 24/9

Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, lectures 1-2 (pp. 290-301)

Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'" (pp. 215-229)

4: W 26/9 -- M 1/10

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§ 1-32, 239-274, 293

Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, ch. 2. (pp. 55-86)

5: W 3/10 (M 8/10 – no class!)

Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought*, ch. 3 (pp. 89-107)

6: W 10/10 -- M 15/10

Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use*, ch. 1 (pp. 1-36)

- Short paper due Wednesday 10/10

7: W 17/10 -- M 22/10

H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation" (pp. 41-59)

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "The Mapping between the Mental and the Public Lexicon"

Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought*, ch. 3 (pp. 107-124)

8: W 24/10 -- M 29/10

B.L. Whorf, "Science and Linguistics."

W.v.O. Quine, "Speaking of Objects."

9: W 31/10 -- M 5/11

Elizabeth Spelke, "What Makes us Smart? Core Knowledge and Natural Language."

Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought*, ch. 3 (pp. 124-151)

10: W 7/11 (M 12/11 – no class!)

Spillover / Recap

11: W 14/11 -- M 19/11

Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs."

Michael Dummett, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs: Comments on Davidson."

- Abstract / outline of research paper due

12: W 21/11 -- M 26/11

Peter Ludlow, "The Myth of Human Language."

Robert Stainton, "In Defense of Public Languages."

13: W 28/11

Spillover / recap

- Research paper due at the end of exam week.