

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Philosophy of Language
Course Code	: PHI4366
Recommended Study Year	: 3 rd Year
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Lecture and tutorial
Class Contact Hours	: 2 hours Lecture/week; 1 hour Tutorial/week
Category in Major Programme	: Core Philosophy Elective
Prerequisite(s)	: PHI3101 Deductive Logic (Note: This prerequisite is waived for BAPAI Senior Year students.)
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course will consider philosophical issues about language and meaning. The standard issues concerning the *semantic* concepts of truth, meaning, and reference will be discussed, such as what it is for a word or sentence to be meaningful; how words and sentences acquire meanings; and what the relation is between meaning and reference. Furthermore, features of language that depend on the contexts in which it is used, questions of *pragmatics*, will also be considered.

Aims

The aims of this course are (1) to introduce the student to the main topics and theories in 20th century Anglo American philosophy of language and (2) to make the student realise the importance of conceptual analysis for clear thinking and argument. Having completed this course the student should be able to understand and formulate the main topics and theories of philosophy of language as well as to make critical use of these theories in his or her own reasoning and argumentation.

Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to enhance basic intellectual skills as well as to promote an enhanced understanding of a number of philosophical issues concerning the nature and functions of language. Completion of the course should grant students:

LO1: Basic knowledge of the issues and arguments in philosophy of language

This knowledge enables students to:

1. Understand and respond critically to the issues and positions involved in philosophical reflection on language
2. Have a good awareness of the complex nature and workings of natural languages, with special emphasis on the practical dimensions of language use

LO2: Ability to engage in further, independent learning and reflection

This ability enables students to:

1. Appreciate the complexity of languages and of ongoing research into them
2. Take note of difficult to notice features of languages and their use
3. Appreciate and engage with arguments on related issues

Indicative Content

1. Introduction
 - a. Syntax, semantics, pragmatics

- b. Use and mention
 - c. Sentences, statements, and propositions
- 2. Reference
 - a. The problem of referring
 - b. Sense and reference
 - c. The referential theory of meaning
 - i. The theory of meaning
 - ii. The theory of descriptions
 - iii. Criticisms of the referential theory and the theory of descriptions
- 3. Proper names and common names
 - a. The description theory of names
 - b. The causal theory of names
 - c. Meaning, reference and common names
- 4. Truth
 - a. The semantic conception of truth
 - b. Meaning and truth: verificationism
 - c. Truth and reference
- 5. A Pragmatic theory of meaning
 - a. Grice's theory
 - b. Speech Act theory (Austin and Searle)
- 6. Wittgenstein on language
 - a. Scepticism about meaning
 - b. Language as a way of life
 - c. Kripke's Wittgenstein

Teaching Method

The course will be taught partly as lectures, partly as a seminar with an introduction and discussions.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Student's successful engagement with the lectures and readings, and corresponding progress towards the learning outcomes outlined above, will be measured by:

- (1) their skills in tutorial discussions to apply new concepts in addressing specific issues in philosophy of language, (This corresponds to LO1 and LO2)
- (2) a midterm exam that will test their understanding of basic concepts, (This corresponds to LO1)
- (3) the final exam in which they will have to show that they can use the knowledge acquired in class to develop their own view about some controversial topic, taking into account both sides of the argument. (This corresponds to LO1 and LO2)

Evaluation of any essay or essay like assessment in this course will be based on either the Philosophy Department Standard Essay Grading Rubric (see attachment), or on a replacement rubric chosen by the instructor.

Assessment

50% Continuous Assessment (possible forms include quizzes, assignments, essays, class presentations and class participation)

50% Final Examination

Required Readings

Miller, Alex, *Philosophy of Language*, London: Francis and Taylor, 1998.

Supplementary Readings

- Blackburn, Simon, *Spreading the Word. Groundings in the Philosophy of Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Grice, Paul, *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Harnish, Robert M., ed., *Basic Topics in the Philosophy of Language*, Harlow: Prentice Hall Europe, 1993.
- Kripke, Saul A., *Naming and Necessity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981.
- Lycan, W., *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, London: Routledge, 1999.
- Martinich, A. P., ed., *The Philosophy of Language*, 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. A selection.
- Morris, M, *Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press: 2007.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman, *Word and Object*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1960.
- Taylor, K, *Truth and Meaning: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*., Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973.
- Wright, Crispin and Hale, Bob, eds. *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.
- 格雷林(著) 格雷林(著), 牟博(譯), 《哲學邏輯引論》, 北京: 中國社會科學出版社, 1990。

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations and Course Work. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.
- (5) Students must adhere to the University’s guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents “Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University” and “Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments” can be found here: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices>.