

**Philosophy of Language
PHIL 2610
University of Hong Kong
Spring 2023**

Tuesdays, 10:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.
Centennial Campus, Central Podium, CPD-2.37

Instructor:	David Villena
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Office Hours:	Tuesdays 09:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m., and by appointment

Course Description

What is a language, and what is involved in knowing or understanding a language? In this course we will see how philosophers and linguists answer such questions as the following: What is a language? What makes linguistic expressions meaningful? What can logic tell us about the grammar of natural languages? Are human beings born with a universal grammar? What is the difference between what we mean and what we convey when we say something? How does a metaphor work?

Course Goals

- Develop an appreciation for and understanding of fundamental problems, texts, and ideas in the philosophy of language.
- Develop skills at critically reading and evaluating philosophical and academic texts.
- Develop skills at reconstructing others' arguments as well as forming and defending one's own.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will be able to

- identify and discuss fundamental problems in the philosophy of language,
- explain and assess theories that have been put forward as solutions to these problems,
- understand how certain problems in the philosophy of language are related,
- understand how certain theories in the philosophy of language are related,
- reconstruct, analyze, and evaluate arguments,
- devise a coherent argument

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

- Students are required to write two short papers (1200 words not including references each), and one term paper (2600 words not including references). The papers should reflect the students' ability to explain the nature of several theories as well as the ability to argue for and against them.
- Students' term papers will be assessed on their ability to write their paper based on an effective introduction, a central thesis, the manner in which that thesis is supported, the quality of research, and their overall writing skills.

Disabilities

Let me know if you have a visible or invisible disability (e.g. mental health condition) that may have some impact on your work in this class so reasonable accommodations and assistance can be provided to you.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Coursework submitted for assessment purposes must be the student's own work and properly acknowledge all sources. Students who plagiarize might be referred to the University's disciplinary committee, and might be expelled from the University as a result. You can find more information at <http://www.hku.hk/plagiarism>. (Also, visit this: <http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>) If you have any doubts as to whether the work you're handing in constitutes plagiarism, please don't hesitate to consult with me beforehand.

Assessment

All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the course

- First Short Paper (30%): Due NOON, 12:00 p.m., March 06
- Second Short Paper (30%): Due NOON, 12:00 p.m., April 03
- Term Paper (40%): Due NOON, 12:00 p.m., May 08

Grading scale

≥ 90%	A+	≤ 100%
≥ 85%	A	< 90%
≥ 80%	A-	< 85%
≥ 75%	B+	< 80%
≥ 70%	B	< 75%
≥ 65%	B-	< 70%
≥ 60%	C+	< 65%
≥ 55%	C	< 60%
≥ 50%	C-	< 55%

≥ 45%	D+	< 50%
≥ 40%	D	< 45%
≥ 0%	F	< 40%

Here are the Faculty of Arts grade descriptions:

http://www.arts.hku.hk/grade_expectations.pdf

Tentative schedule

Week 1: Introduction

Reading:

- J. Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, Book III, Chapters I-III (excerpts)

Week 2: Sense and reference

Reading:

- G. Frege, On sense and reference

Weeks 3 & 4: Definite descriptions and reference

Readings:

- B. Russell, On denoting
- K. Donnellan, Reference and definite descriptions
- S. Kripke, Speaker's reference and semantic reference

Week 5: Meaning and verification

Suggested readings:

- A. J. Ayer, *Language, truth, and logic*, Chapter 1
- C. G. Hempel, "Empiricist criteria of cognitive significance: Problems and changes"

Weeks 6 & 8: Analyticity

[Week 7: No Class (Reading week)]

Readings:

- W. V. Quine, Two dogmas of empiricism
- H. P. Grice & P. F. Strawson, In defense of a dogma

Weeks 9: Indeterminacy of translation

Readings:

- W. V. Quine, *Word and object*, Chapter 2
- W. V. Quine, On the reasons for indeterminacy of translation

Week 10-12: Intentions and speech acts

Suggested readings:

- H. P. Grice, Meaning
- J. L. Austin, Performative utterances
- J. L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, Lectures I, V-VI, VIII-IX
- J. R. Searle, What is a speech act?
- J. R. Searle, A taxonomy of illocutionary acts
- H. P. Grice, Logic and conversation

- J. R. Searle, Indirect speech acts

Week 13 & 14: Evolution of language

Suggested readings:

- S. Pinker & P. Bloom, Natural language and natural selection
- M. H. Christiansen & S. Kirby, Language evolution: Consensus and controversies
- M. Hauser *et al.*, The mystery of language evolution

Additional resources

- Cappelen, H., & Dever, J. (2019). *Bad language*. Oxford University Press.
- Fennell, J. (2019). *A critical introduction to the philosophy of language: Central themes from Locke to Wittgenstein*. Routledge.
- Hale, B., Wright, C., & Miller, A. (Eds.). (2017). *A companion to the philosophy of language*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kemp, G. (2018). *What is this thing called philosophy of language?* Routledge.
- Lepore, E., & Smith, B. C. (2008). *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of language*. Oxford University Press.
- Lycan, W. G. (2019). *Philosophy of language: A contemporary introduction*. Routledge.
- Martinich, A. P., & Sosa, D. (Eds.). (2012). *The philosophy of language*. Oxford University Press.
- McGinn, C. (2015). *Philosophy of language: The classics explained*. The MIT Press.
- Miller, A. (2018). *Philosophy of language*. Routledge.
- Morris, M. (2007). *An introduction to the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.