

Philosophy of Language

21/22

Semester 2

Meaning, reference, and description are three important notions in the study of language. But they raise challenging questions. What's the relationship between them? How is the meaning or reference of a term determined? That is, what are the more basic facts that *constitute* facts of the following sort: *s* means that *p*, or *t* refers to *x*. What's the relationship between meaning/reference/description and the context in which speech occurs? How are these notions related to other philosophically interesting notions, like the notions of propositional-attitude psychology (e.g., cognitive significance, linguistic competence, psychological explanation) and metaphysical modality (necessity, contingency, essence)? In this course, we'll carefully consider these questions and the most influential answers to them. Our goal will be to better understand the nature of language, but also to appreciate how the philosophy of language might shed light on some traditional debates in philosophy of mind and metaphysics.

Course Organiser:

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Lecturer:

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Course Secretary:

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Lecture Times and Location

Lectures will be held on Tuesdays from 1:10 to 2pm in 40 George Square Lecture Theatre B, and on Thursdays from 10 to 10:50am in 7 George Square S.1. All tutorials will be held on Mondays: group 1 at 9 to 9:50am in DSB 1.17; group 2 at 10 to 10:50am in DSB 1.17; group 3 at 1:10 to 2pm 7GS S37; group 4 at 2:10 to 3pm in DSB 1.17.

Lecture Topics and Readings

Week	Topic	Core Reading
Week 1	Frege on sense and reference	Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference" (1892)

Week	Topic	Core Reading
Week 2	Russell on descriptions and names	Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting" (1905)
Week 3	Strawson on descriptions	P.F. Strawson, "On Referring" (1950)
Week 4	Generics and racist/sexist speech/cognition	Sarah-Jane Leslie, "Generics: Cognition and Acquisition" (2008) and "The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice and Generalization" (2017)
Week 5	Kripke on descriptivism	Saul Kripke, Lectures 1 and 2 of <i>Naming and Necessity</i> (1972)
Week 6	The foundations of pragmatics	H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation" (1975) David Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game" (1979)
Week 7	Social philosophy of language	Rae Langton and Caroline West, "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game" (1999) Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts" (1993)
Week 8	Social philosophy of language	Hilary Putnam, "The Analytic and the Synthetic" (1962) Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" (2000)
Week 9	Social philosophy of language	Haslanger, "What Are We Talking About? The Semantics and Politics of Social Kinds" (2005) Haslanger, "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground" (2011)
Week 10	Buffer	
Week 11	Reading week	

Further advice on Readings

Encyclopaedias are a good source of extra reading. Avoid Wikipedia (it is often inaccurate on philosophy), but there are good internet encyclopaedias that can be useful:

[The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (SEP)

[The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (IEP)

Websites

We also recommend the following as starting points for your research:

[PhilPapers](#)

[Philosophy Compass](#)

[The Diversity Reading List](#)

You will need to know how to track down sources, including electronic journals, using the library search engine [DiscoverED](#).

Tutorials

You will have weekly tutorials. These give you a chance to further discuss topics and issues in the course and its lectures. Tutorials will take place, at times and places and in a format to be arranged, during weeks 2 through 11 of the semester.

Attendance at tutorials is **compulsory** for all students in this course. The instructor will maintain a register of attendance. Unexplained absences will be brought to the attention of your Personal Tutor.

You will be allocated a suitable tutorial group by the Timetabling Department based on your timetable. Should you wish to change the group you have been allocated to, you will need to fill in the *Tutorial Group Change form* on the Timetabling Department's webpage.

Please inform your tutor and the Teaching Office of any absences. Students who miss tutorials may be required to do additional written work.

Assessment

This course has two assessments: a **midterm essay** of 1500 words, worth 40% of your final mark, and a **final essay** of 2500 words, worth 60% of your final mark.

Detailed information concerning assignments will be available on Learn.

Word Counts: The word count of your essay and assignments, including footnotes but excluding bibliography, must not exceed the specified word limit. The precise word count must be written on the coversheet. Overlong essays will be penalised according to the following rule: 1% of the maximum obtainable mark will be deducted for every 100 words, or part thereof, over the word limit. So, exceeding the word limit by 1-100 words incurs a deduction of 1%; exceeding by 101-200 words incurs a deduction of 2%; and so on.

Visiting undergraduates

The assessment arrangements for visiting undergraduates are the same as for other students.

Mark Schemes

For Philosophy-specific marking guidelines go here:

[Grade-related marking guidelines for Philosophy](#)

For the University's general marking scheme go here:

[Common Marking Scheme](#)

Learning Resources

LEARN

You should regularly check your university email and check for announcements on the course *Learn* page.

The course *Learn* page will provide information concerning:

- General information and announcement about the course
- Lecture notes and slides
- Tutorial arrangements
- Information about assessment arrangements

University of Edinburgh Library

The library's hard-copy and online resources can be searched online via *DiscoverEd*.

Autonomous Learning Groups

Each course has dedicated Autonomous Learning Groups. It is up to you, the members of the ALG, to organise the meetings. You decide how often to meet and what to do in your ALG. ALGs are designed to help you learn and get to know your classmates; they are not a formal requirement of the course. It is important to note that assessment in your courses is non-competitive: you aren't competing against your classmates, only against the general grade criteria. It is in your interests to help each other.

You could use ALG meetings to:

- Read and discuss the papers together
- Discuss essay-writing and time-management techniques
- Constructively critique draft essays or plans
- Work on presentations or discussion posts that the class may involve
- Share tips on career advice

Please email the Course Organiser if you feel that it would be useful for the group if they joined one of your sessions. Please contact the course secretary if you find it necessary during the semester to transfer into a different group.

Getting in Touch

If you have a question regarding lecture content you should ask it in your tutorial group and/or visit the relevant lecturer to discuss it during their office hour.

For other specifically academic matters you can contact the Course Organiser.

If you have questions not specifically about lecture content, you should contact the Course Secretary.