

PHIL30540 Philosophy of Communication

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Introduction

Communication with language is one of the things that makes us human. Not only does it allow for the complex communities we inhabit, but it plays a major role in our self conception as beings in the world. From a biological point of view this behaviour is unique. Other creatures communicate but nothing else has language in the way that we do.

In the 20th century philosophers working in the analytic tradition and linguists (and other cognitive scientists) have offered several insights into the nature of language and linguistic communication.

This course will introduce you to these insights and present some of the problems that motivate current research.

The course will provide the following learning outcomes:

1. To understand several important theories about linguistic communication
2. To be able to use that understanding to critically assess these theories
3. To be able to apply that understanding to a range of problems in philosophy of language, metaethics, and epistemology

Assessment

The course will be assessed by three 1500 word essays due at the end of weeks 4, 8, and 12. Each essay is worth one third of the final grade. The word count includes footnotes and excludes reference lists.

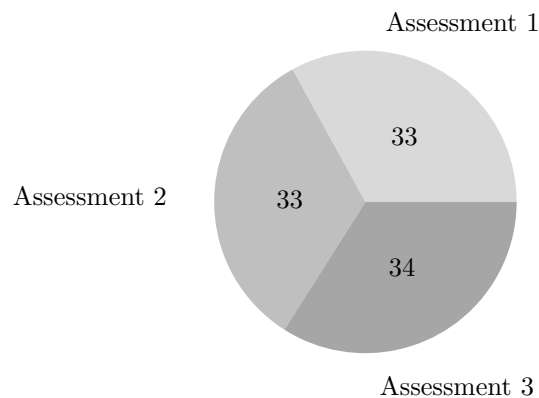


Figure 1: Assessment structure

Teaching

There will be two one-hour lectures in weeks 1–12, and one one-hour tutorial in weeks 3–10.

Reading

For each of the twelve weeks of the course there is a topic or question and one piece of core reading. There is also a list of one or more pieces of useful optional reading. You may also find the following general introductions to topics we will discuss helpful:

- Carnie (2013)
- Elbourne (2011)
- Heim and Kratzer (1997)
- Huang (2007)
- Miller (2007)

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is also an excellent resource. The following entries are particularly relevant to this course:

- Descriptions
- Implicature
- Indexicals
- Logical Form
- Philosophy of Linguistics
- Pragmatics
- Presupposition
- Theories of Meaning

Several of the papers assigned are collected in Ezcurdia and Stainton (2013).

Essay topics

1. How should we draw the line between what words mean and what speakers mean?
2. Should 'Travis cases' make us rethink truth-conditional semantics?
3. What is the contribution of linguistic structure to human communication?

The best essay responses will refer to the papers we will discuss, and engage with the questions in light of them. You should identify a sub-problem to focus on in your essays rather than trying to engage with too much. In 1500 words depth is more important than breadth. It would be a good idea to discuss your approach to the essay with me at an early stage. In my office hours I will read and comment on essay plans of one page or less; I will not comment on full drafts.

Schedule

Week 1

Russell (1905)

Bertrand Russell argued that certain philosophical problems could be solved by identifying an underlying *logical form* which explained the logical properties of sentences while not being immediately obvious from their surface form.

- Neale (2005)

Week 2

Strawson (1950)

Peter Strawson's response to Russell focused on the difference between the meaning of a sentence and what the user of the sentence meant by uttering it. How to understand this distinction is a central question of contemporary theories of communication.

Keith Donnellan uses an example involving murder and an association of mental illness with violence. His point can be made with other examples.

- Donnellan (1966)
- Kripke (1977)

Week 3

Grice (1989)

H. P. Grice's theory of the relationship between *what is said* and *what is implicated* has defined a subfield of linguistics and philosophy of language devoted to addressing the question raised by Russell and Strawson's work.

- Neale (1992)
- Potts (2007)
- Blome-Tillmann (2013)

Week 4

Saul (2002b)

In this paper Jennifer Saul provides useful clarification of the scope and success of Grice's project.

- Bach (1994)
- Bach (1999)
- Bach (2001)
- Saul (2002a)

Week 5

Travis (1997)

The Gricean approach to meaning and communication neatly divides what is communicated into what is said and what is implicated. Many recent theorists

have argued that the connection is much more messy and complicated than Grice acknowledges. Charles Travis' paper provides a clear statement of the motivations for this idea.

- Cappelen and Lepore (2003)
- Kennedy and McNally (2009)

Week 6

Bezuidenhout (2002)

Anne Bezuidenhout provides further arguments for thinking that *what is said* is less tightly constrained by linguistic meaning than Grice acknowledged.

- Recanati (2001a)
- Recanati (2001b)

Week 7

Borg (2007)

The contextualist view defended by Travis, Bezuidenhout, and others has been rejected by some philosophers of language who worry that it makes a mystery of linguistic communication. Emma Borg provides a useful way to understand this debate.

- Cappelen and Lepore (2004)
- Wedgwood (2007)

Week 8

Carston (2008)

This paper by Robyn Carston brings together several parts of the contextualism–minimalism debate.

- Carston (1988)
- Wilson and Sperber (2004)
- Borg (2016)

Week 9

Stanley (2002)

Jason Stanley's work on context sensitivity connects the issues more explicitly to the question of logical form and its usefulness in explaining communication.

- Reimer (1998)
- Stanley (2000)
- Stanley and Szabó (2000)
- Stanley (2005)

- King and Stanley (2005)
- Hall (2008)

Week 10

Recanati (2002)

Sometimes there appear to be more things in contents than in the sentences that express them. This phenomenon is investigated by François Recanati by examining the relationship between logical form and what is said.

- Perry (1986)
- Borg (2005)
- Recanati (2007)
- Cappelen and Lepore (2007)

Week 11

Martí (2006)

Luisa Martí's response to François Recanati continues the debate about logical form and what is said.

- Taylor (2001)
- Stainton (2005)
- Sennet (2008)
- Martí (2015)

Week 12

Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch (2002)

Marc Hauser, Noam Chomsky, and Tecumseh Fitch present a theory of what the core faculty of human language is. Possession of this faculty is what separates (human) language users from (non-human) communicators.

- Chomsky (1995)
- Carston (2000)

License



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