

**THEORIES OF MEANING / PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE**  
Fall 2016

Instructor: Zsófia Zvolenszky

Place and time: MÚK 4/i 224

Thursday 12:00–16:00

Google address for the course: theories.of.meaning@gmail.com, password: meaning2016  
readings under ‘Drive’

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office hours: After the block seminars on Thursdays at 16:00

This is a block seminar. We’ll meet on 5 occasions.

Week 0 block, introduction (this meeting will be shorter): **November 10**

Week 1 block: **November 17**

Week 2 block: **December 1**

Week 3 block: **December 8**

Week 4 block: **December 15**

**For Week 0, read the Lycan introduction, and look through the readings a bit, so you get a sense of which reading you might like to present on.**

### **Prerequisites**

– Students should be prepared to read and discuss materials in English. The language of instruction for the course is English.

### **Requirements**

- 50-80 pages of reading for each week
- at the beginning of (almost) every seminar, a short quiz (these count towards 10% of the final grade)
- posting 2 questions/comments at the course discussion forum for each class (10% of the final grade), by 4 p.m. on Wednesday
- class participation (worth 20%)
- writing 4 short (2-3-page-long) response papers during the semester (the best 3 of these go towards 30% of the final grade)
- Once during the semester, acting as MC (Master of Ceremonies) (this involves introducing the readings as well as students’ questions and comments, worth 30%)
- Because this is a block course that works as a seminar (so participation is key), your grade will be significantly affected by missed classes, even if you miss just one afternoon. In order to receive a grade, you are required to attend at least 4 of the seminar blocks.

### **Course description**

Our words, sentences are about—refer to—things in the world: objects, people, events. Plausibly, the meanings of expressions play a central role in explaining this referential feature: for example, it is in virtue of the meaning of the word ‘horse’ that it refers to horses. But what exactly does this role played by meaning consist in? The answer is not at all straightforward. Consider these two sentences:

Mark Twain was a famous novelist.

Samuel Clemens was a famous novelist.

How does the meaning of the first sentence differ from the meaning of the second? After all, both are about the same individual: who was called Samuel Clemens but became famous under the pseudonym ‘Mark Twain’. Yet—according to Gottlob Frege—the two sentences cannot have the same meaning because someone may rationally believe one (the first, say), without believing the other. This is what Frege’s “puzzle”

consists in, providing the starting point for 20th-century philosophy of language. In the seminar, our aim is to gain a greater understanding of the nature of meaning, and its relation to reference, truth, communication.

## Readings

Alongside seminal texts in the philosophy of language (by Frege, Grice, Kripke and Strawson), and a recent survey article on racism in language use (by Langton, Haslanger and Anderson), one more reading will function as a “textbook”:

- William Lycan (ed.) 2008: *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge (referred to as ‘Lycan’ in the schedule below). Excerpts from selected chapters will be assigned.

Electronic copies of all required readings are available in the Gmail Drive for the course. The seminal texts (by Frege, Grice, Kripke and Strawson) can also be found in the following anthology:

- P. Martinich and D. Sosa (eds.) 2012: *The Philosophy of Language*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford: OUP. (Previous editions are ok, except for Frege’s “Sense and Reference”, which appears in a different translation in earlier editions.)

Langton–Haslanger–Anderson’s survey article “Language and Race” can be found in the following anthology of essays:

- G. Russell and D. G. Fara (eds.) 2012: *Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. New York: Routledge.

The readings are already uploaded. (There are several further papers uploaded in case you become interested in other topics). The schedule of readings covered is on the next page. To even out the semester a bit, it’s a good idea for students to pace themselves and read ahead in September–October.

## About the requirements

You should come to class ready to discuss the readings, having read them all, preferably several times—reading philosophy can be tricky (the “textbook” readings should make it much easier to read the classic papers by Frege, Russell, etc.)

You should **post 2 questions/comments on the readings by 4 p.m. on Wednesday, sending them to the course’s gmail address**. Be sure to include your name in the message.

Being **Master of Ceremonies** (when it’s your turn) involves: **(i) giving a brief, 15-minute summary of the readings**, selecting maximum ten of the student questions/comments posted at the gmail address, grouping them by topic, **compiling a handout of the questions/comments that you bring to class printed out**. Be sure to include the authors of the questions, so we know who made which comment.

In the **response paper**, you should focus on critical assessment, don’t just summarize the reading(s). Instead, select an argument or claim that you consider interesting and critique it (the more focused the better). Select one (or several) of the given week’s readings on which you’re basing your response paper. Three useful sites about writing response papers:

<http://www.davidhildebrand.org/teaching/tips-hints/paper-how-write-short-critical-response-paper/>

<http://web.mit.edu/sts001/www/responsetips.pdf>

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> (this one is intended for a longer piece than ours).

Bring the response papers to class printed out (of course, no paper is due on Week 0). Late response papers won’t be accepted.

Regular preparation, attendance and participation are required. To receive a grade, you must attend at 4 of the seminar blocks.

## SCHEDULE

First seminar		Week 0
Introduction	Lycan Ch1 pp. 1-6.	Week 0
Frege on sense and reference	Frege: On Sense and Nominatum (1892) Lycan: Ch1 pp. 1-6., Ch2 pp. 9-12.	Week 1
Russell and Strawson on definite descriptions	Russell: On Denoting (1905) Lycan Ch2 pp. 12-21.	Week 2
	Strawson: On Referring (1950) Lycan: Ch2 pp. 21-30	Week 2
Kripke and Putnam on meaning and reference	Kripke: <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , (1970, 1980), Lecture2 up to the bottom of p. 97 Lycan: Ch3 pp. 31-34, Ch4 pp. 53-58	Week 3
	Kripke: <i>Naming and Necessity</i> (1970, 1980), excerpts: Ch1 p. 44 (“Of course...”)–bottom of p. 53 ...Ch2 from p. 97 (“I think the next topic...”) to the end Lycan: Ch3 pp. 34-43, Ch4 pp. 45-53 from “In <i>Meaning and Necessity</i> ...” ...up to “...objectual quantification into that position.”	Week 3
Grice on meaning	Grice: Meaning (1948, 1957) Lycan: Ch7 pp. 86-97.	Week 4
Grice on communication.	Grice: Logic and Conversation (1967/1975) Grice: The Causal Theory of Perception (1961), excerpt: pp. 126-132. Lycan: Ch13 pp. 156-167	Week 4
An application of Grice’s proposal about communication: racism and language use.	Langton, Haslanger and Anderson (2012) 753-766 (in Russell-Fara anthology)	Week 4