**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

**Code of course:**

**Title of course: Introduction to Philosophy of Language / Theories of Meaning**

**Lecturer: Zsófia Zvolenszky**

**General aim of the course:**

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:

Joanne K. Rowling is a famous novelist.

Robert Galbraith is 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 became famous as J. K. Rowling but has also written under the pseudonym ‘Robert Galbraith’. 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.

The aim of the course is to review and discuss central issues in philosophy of language based on influential primary and secondary texts:

**Content of the course:**

• Frege on sense and reference, on proper names and definite descriptions

• Russell and Strawson on definite descriptions

• Kripke on proper names

• Kripke and Putnam on natural kind terms

• Grice on meaning

• Austin and Searle on speech acts

• Grice on communication

• Applications of Grice, Frege, Strawson: for example, pejorative language use

**Grading criteria, specific requirements for the course:**

– 30–40 pages of reading each week

– at the beginning of (almost) every seminar, a short online quiz for which you will receive an access link (the 6 highest scores count towards 20% of the final grade) in Canvas

– posting 2 questions/comments at the course discussion forum each week (the 10 best make up 20 % of the final grade), by 4 p.m. on Tuesday

– class participation (worth 15 %)

– writing 3 short (2-3-page-long) response papers during the semester (the best 2 of these go towards 30 % of the final grade)

– once during the semester, giving a presentation (this involves briefly introducing the readings as well as students’ questions and comments, worth 15 %)

**Required readings:**

Alongside texts that have been highly influential in the development of 20th-21st-century philosophy of language (classic articles by Frege, Grice, Kripke, Strawson, Austin, Searle, Putnam), and a recent survey article on racism in language use (by Langton, Haslanger and Anderson), one more reading will function as a textbook:

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

In the process of discussing the central ideas of the classic articles, we’ll also reflect on limitations in their scope and recent philosophical attempts at responding to those limitations.

Electronic copies of all required readings are available in the course’s Dropbox folder for the course. The classic 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*, 6th 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 bulk of the articles can also be found in the following anthology:

–P. Martinich (ed.) 1996 : The Philosophy of Language. Oxford: OUP.

**Suggested further reading:**