**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

**Code of course:**

**Title of course: Special Topics in Philosophy of Language: Reflections on Language and Varied Perspectives**

**Lecturer: Zsófia Zvolenszky**

**General aim of the course:**

Through the literary lens of two acclaimed black women’s short stories, we’ll consider how varied perspectives play a role in their story-telling and how the richness of understanding gained through story-telling has, in some ways, eluded traditional approaches in philosophy of language.

The authors are the Nigerian-born **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** and the American sci-fi writer **Octavia E. Butler**. The varied perspectives involve shedding light on reality from a radically different angle. That might be the perspective of a Nigerian black woman facing discrimination, sexual harassment, objectification at the workplace. Or incomprehension as she is applying for an asylum visa at an American Embassy after her child was killed. Or, through sci-fi work of Butler’s, the perspective of people confronting coexistence with alien species that highlight how trauma-filled histories of animosity between the groups might leave persisting scars, tension, which may be healed or aggravated. These sci-fi scenarios, in turn, provide novel perspectives for reflecting on conflicts within human societies. We’ll explore how Butler’s sci-fi work can also shed light on societal prejudices, stigmas; about the role of anger in humans if communication skills were massively impaired. We’ll highlight how those varied perspectives of the short stories can (and cannot) be captured with, can be informed by, the tools, observations of recent work in philosophy of language about phenomena like pejorative language, oppression through language, lexical effects.

The core textbook for the course is Josh Dever’s and Herman Cappelen’s (2019) *Bad Language*, through which students will get an insight into 20th-21st century developments in the logical, conceptual toolkit for understanding aspects of linguistic meaning and communication.

**Content of the course:**

* ideal and non-ideal communication
* lying and misleading
* generics and defective reasoning
* slurs and pejorative language
* linguistic oppressing, linguistic silencing
* lexical effects
* the speech act of consent
* each topic discussed will be coupled with a short story by Adichie or Butler

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

– 40–60 pages of reading each week

– 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 20 %)

– once during the semester, giving a presentation (this involves briefly introducing the Cappelen-Dever chapter of the week as well as students’ questions and comments, worth 25 %)

For BA and MA students taking the course:

– writing 2 short (2-3-page-long) response papers during the semester (these go towards 35 % of the final grade)

For Ph.D. students, the requirements include, in addition, a longer critical essay. Please contact the instructor to discuss the details, timeline for it.

**Required readings:**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009, Fourth Estate).

Octavia Butler: *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995, 4W8W).

Herman Cappelen and Josh Dever: *Bad Language* (2019 OUP).

**Suggested further reading:**