

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2011-12**

Philosophy 3270G: Philosophy and Linguistics

Previously Philosophy 307F/G

**Winter Term 2011
Tu 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. Th 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.
Middlesex College Room 17**

**Instructor: R. Stainton
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DESCRIPTION

This course will cover *philosophy of linguistics* as well *philosophy and linguistics*. That is, it will address philosophical foundations of contemporary theoretical (broadly generative) linguistics as well as “case studies” at the crossroads of the two disciplines.

Of interest to undergraduate and graduate students in both the linguistics and philosophy programs, it is important to stress that this is a philosophy course first and foremost. Nonetheless, while familiarity with at least one is essential, the course will not presuppose detailed knowledge of either discipline.

TEXTS

Daniela Isac and Charles Reiss (2008). *I-Language: An Introduction to Linguistics as Cognitive Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

OBJECTIVES

The seminar will begin with a brief textbook-based introduction to linguistics in the generative tradition. Having arrived at some sense of what theoretical linguistics is, we will then consider in more depth philosophical issues about and within the discipline. In the first part, we will focus on ontological and epistemological issues such as: “What is the ontological status of natural languages, material, mental or abstract? What is linguistics about? What other disciplines is it most closely related to: psychology, mathematics or anthropology? Given the answers to the foregoing, what are the proper methods for investigating natural languages?” In the second part, the focus will be on questions within linguistics that overlap philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, especially unconscious rule following, indeterminacy of meaning, and language-world relations. Other topics that arise along the way include: modularity of mind; innateness; language-thought relations; and interfaces between syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

TOPICS

I. *Preliminaries*

II. *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics in the Generative Tradition*

- Daniela Isac & Charles Reiss, Chaps 1, 3 and 4

III. *Philosophy of Linguistics: Methodology and Ontology*

- Jerrold Katz (1977), “The Real Status of Semantic Representations”
- Barbara Partee (1978), “Semantics: Mathematics or Psychology?”
- Scott Soames (1984), “Linguistics and Psychology”
- Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny (1989), “Linguistics: What’s wrong with ‘The Right View’”.
- Alexander George (1989), “How Not to Get Confused About Linguistics”
- Louise Antony (2003), “Rabbit-Pots and Supernovas: On the Relevance of Psychological Data to Linguistic Theory”

IV. *Linguistics and Philosophy of Mind/Language*

- W.V.O. Quine (1970), “Methodological Reflections on Current Linguistic Theory”
- Stephen Stich (1971) “What Every Speaker Knows”
- Stephen Stich (1972) “Grammar, Psychology and Indeterminacy”
- W.V.O. Quine (1987), “Indeterminacy of Translation Again”
- Donald Davidson (1986), “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs”
- Hilary Putnam (1973), “Meaning and Reference”

V. *Chomskian Rebuttals*

- Isac & Reiss, Chap 5-7
- Noam Chomsky (1992), “Explaining Language Use”
- Noam Chomsky (1995), “Language and Nature”

REQUIREMENTS

In-Class Participation: 10%

Problem Sets in Linguistics: 15%

“Briefing Notes” on Selected Philosophical Readings: 20%

In-Class Exam: 25%

Short Essay: 30%

• *Problem Sets:* Homework exercises will be assigned as appropriate, to help students more fully grasp the material from theoretical linguistics.

• *Briefing Notes:* At the outset of the relevant classes, students will hand in two to four pages of typewritten notes on the chapter assigned. (500-1000 words is appropriate.) These “briefing notes” will consist of two parts: an outline of the main argument being made (which is not

necessarily an outline of the paper), and some critical questions and comments.

- *Exam*: The in-class exam will take place in March. It will cover all the material presented up to that point. Some knowledge of linguistic details will be tested, on the grounds that familiarity with actual linguistic theorizing is essential to successful philosophical reflection on the discipline. Nonetheless, the focus will be on comprehension of larger philosophical themes.
- *Essay*: The paper should be the sort of thing one could submit to a student conference – ideally about 12 double-spaced pages in length, definitely not more than 14 pages. It may be either more empirical or more philosophical, depending upon the interests and background of the student.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.