

Philosophy & Psychology of Language

PHIL 340A / PSYC 347A

Whitman College – Fall 2008

Tue & Thu 6:30-8:30pm / Mem 313

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Note: We will have dinner every Thursday evening in the campus center starting at 5:30. Please feel free to join us!

Overview

The guiding premise of this course is that in the study of language there are no sharp divides between the detailed empirical research conducted by psychologists and linguists, the more general theories that they construct to explain their findings, and the even more general issues and theories presented by philosophers. It is our position that philosophical theories of the nature of language must take account of both the fact that language is acquired and the particular psychological processes by which children come to acquire it. Similarly, psychological research on and theories of language acquisition must take account of philosophical considerations on the nature of language. Our class this semester will take some first steps toward this type of integrated understanding of language.

Readings

All of the assigned readings for the course are available through CLEO. You can login to the CLEO site from the main Students' webpage. The readings can be found in the "Resources" tab.

Summary of Requirements and Grading

Class Participation –

Our class meetings will primarily focus on conversation about the readings and the larger issues that they suggest. You are expected to be an active and productive participant in our conversations. To do this, you must:

- carefully read (and often re-read) the assigned texts before class,
- take notes on the reading, and
- come to our meetings with questions, themes, and ideas to discuss.

In addition, we will often provide guiding questions or issues for you to address in preparation for discussion.

The issues and views that we will be examining this semester are quite challenging, and our meetings will surely help you to gain a better understanding of them. Students who are habitually absent (either physically or mentally), unprepared, or uninvolved typically hand in poor work; there will be no additional penalty. On the other hand, if you demonstrate a particularly good grasp of the issues and material in our meetings, your final grade may be *raised* to reflect that.

Mid-Semester Papers — 70% of your total grade (first = 15%, second = 25%, and third = 30%)

During the course of the semester, you will write three moderate-length essays in which you explain and evaluate the approaches that we're examining and begin to develop your own thinking about the various psychological and philosophical issues and their interrelations. These papers will help you work towards the larger, more independent final project.

The weighting of the papers reflects the fact that as the semester progresses, there will be more material for you to address, and your own position will naturally become more sophisticated. The papers will be cumulative, in that you will be addressing new issues and approaches while still reevaluating your views of earlier material.

Final Paper — 30% of your total grade

At the end of the semester, you will submit a full-length essay which integrates philosophical and psychological issues in some way that goes beyond the material that we cover together in class. You will have significant freedom to choose a topic that particularly interests you. It could involve further exploration of one of the authors or approaches that we consider in class, incorporation of some other approach or theory, and/or application of the course material to some new issue or question.

We *strongly* encourage you to discuss your ideas and interests with us throughout the semester. We will meet with each of you immediately after Thanksgiving Break, to work out a specific plan for your project. Our last two class meetings will be devoted to brief presentations and discussions of your ideas, providing a forum for you to brainstorm and develop your ideas together. The final paper will be due at the end of finals week.

**** NOTE **** You cannot receive a passing grade for the course if:

- You miss 6 or more class meetings, *for any reason*;
- You miss or fail any of the mid-semester papers, *for any reason*; or
- You miss or fail the final paper, *for any reason*.

Extensions and Late Policies

1. Mid-Semester Papers

We would like every student to have a chance to manage her schedule and submit her best work. Hence, anyone can get a brief extension for any reason, according to the following stipulations:

- a) All requests for extensions must be made at least 24 hours before the paper is due.
- b) You must propose a new due date and time.
- c) You may only receive 1 extension per paper (i.e. no extensions of extensions).

Late assignments will not be accepted. If you do not turn in your paper by the due date (original or extended), then you will fail the paper (and hence the class). **Exceptions to these policies will be made only if you have had a real catastrophe.** (We hope not!) In that case, you should first talk to the Dean of Students or one of the other Powers That Be, and we will make every reasonable accommodation.

2. Final Paper

There will be *absolutely* no extensions on the final paper – it is already due as late as it possibly can be. If there is a legitimate reason why you cannot complete the assignment on time, you will need to talk with the Dean of Students to arrange for an Incomplete.

Academic Honesty

All of the work that you submit in this course must be entirely your own. Of course, you can seek help in a variety of ways to prepare your papers. So it is **permitted** (and even recommended!) for you to: consult additional readings, search for material on the internet, discuss your ideas with other students, exchange notes with other students, and read and discuss drafts of each other's papers. If you do use someone else's words or specific ideas in your written work, you *must* provide a proper citation to the source.

Plagiarism will *not* be tolerated in any form. You have signed a statement indicating that you understand and will abide by the College policy on plagiarism. **Any student caught plagiarizing will automatically fail the course**, and may face more severe penalties from the College. (For more details, see the Student Handbook.)

Tentative Schedule of Topics & Assignments

1. Preliminaries

- Tue. Sep. 2 course introduction
- Thu. Sep. 4 Karmiloff & Karmiloff-Smith, "Experimental Paradigms for Studying Language Acquisition"
Pinker, The Language Instinct, ch. 2.
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2. Word – World Theories

- Tue. Sep. 9 Jackendoff, Patterns in the Mind, chs. 1-4.
- Thu. Sep. 11 Stainton, "Direct Reference"
Stainton, "Mediated Reference," secs. 1-2
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- Tue. Sep. 16 Fodor, "Why There Still Has to Be a Language of Thought," excerpts
Fodor, "Meaning and the World Order," excerpts
- Thu. Sep. 18 Markman, "Constraints on Word Learning"
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- Tue. Sep. 23 Waxman, "Links between Object Categorization and Naming"
- Thu. Sep. 25 Quine, "Ontological Relativity," excerpts
- * Fri. Sep. 26 *first paper due by 2:00 p.m. to Mitch's mailbox in Olin*
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- Tue. Sep. 30 Martin, "Truth and Meaning"
Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning"

3. Intentionality Theories

- Thu. Oct. 2 Baldwin & Meyer, "How Inherently Social Is Language?"
Akhtar & Tomasello, "The Social Nature of Words and World Learning"
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- Tue. Oct. 7 L. Bloom, "The Intentionality Model of Word Learning"
- Thu. Oct. 9 Searle, "How Language Works"
Searle, "Meaning"
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- Tue. Oct. 13 NO CLASS – FALL BREAK
- Thu. Oct. 15 P. Bloom, "Mindreading, Communication and the Learning of Names for Things"
Sabbagh, Henderson, & Baldwin, "What Infants' Understanding of Referential Intentions Tells Us about the Neurocognitive Bases of Early Word Learning"
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- Tue. Oct. 21 Searle, "Intentionality and the Brain"
Searle, "Intentionality and Its Place in Nature"
- Thu. Oct. 23 Searle, "Indeterminacy, Empiricism, and the First Person"
- * *Fri. Oct. 24 second paper due by 2:00 p.m. to Mitch's mailbox in Olin*
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4. Use-Based Theories

- Tue. Oct. 28 Samuelson & Smith, "Memory and Attention Make Smart Word Learning: An Alternative Account of Akhtar, Carpenter, and Tomasello"
Smith, Maouene, & Hidaka, "The Body and Children's Word Learning"
- Thu. Oct. 30 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, excerpts #1
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- Tue. Nov. 4 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, excerpts #2
- Thu. Nov. 6 Sellars, "Some Reflections on Language Games," excerpts
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- Tue. Nov. 11 Smith, "Children's Noun Learning: How General Learning Processes Make Specialized Learning Mechanisms"
- Thu. Nov. 13 Van Gelder, "What Might Cognition Be, If Not Computation?" excerpts
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Tue. Nov. 18 Iverson & Thelen, "Hand, Mouth and Brain: The Dynamic Emergence of
Speech and Gesture"

Thu. Nov. 20 Bloom et al., "Counterpoint Commentary," excerpts

* Fri. Nov. 21 *third paper due by 2:00 p.m. to Mitch's mailbox in Olin*

Thanksgiving Break

Tue. Dec. 2 NO CLASS – MEET WITH US ABOUT FINAL PROJECT

Thu. Dec. 4 NO CLASS – WORK ON FINAL PROJECT

Tue. Dec. 9 student presentations

Thu. Dec. 11 student presentations & semester wrap-up

* Fri. Dec. 19 *final paper due by 4:00 p.m. to Mitch's mailbox in Olin*