

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Department of Philosophy
and
Masters Program in Linguistics

Phil 9451: Philosophy and Linguistics
(Winter Term)

Instructors: Ileana Paul and Robert J. Stainton
Class Days and Hours: Tu 12:30-3:30

Office: UC136b and UC112
Phone: 85360 and 85819
Email: Ileana@uwo.ca;
rstainto@uwo.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This seminar will cover philosophy *and* linguistics as well as philosophy *of* linguistics. That is, it will address issues at the intersection of the two disciplines, as well as philosophical foundations of contemporary theoretical (broadly generative) linguistics.

The seminar will begin with a brief textbook-based introduction to linguistics in the generative tradition. Having arrived at some sense of what linguistics is, we will then consider in more detail philosophical issues about the discipline. This “philosophical foundations” section will focus on ontological and epistemological issues: What, if anything, do facts about natural languages supervene upon? What is the ontological status of natural languages, material, mental or abstract? Given the answers to the foregoing, what are the proper methods for investigating natural languages? We will read classic papers from Philosophy of Language, followed by a series of rebuttals by Noam Chomsky. The seminar will culminate in a component on intersections: “case studies”, drawn from Ray Jackendoff’s recent work, in which philosophy and generative linguistics overlap. The topics will likely include the contribution of linguistics to theories of mental computation and representation, consciousness, action and social cognition.

Of interest to graduate students in both the linguistics and philosophy graduate programs, the course will not presuppose detailed knowledge of either discipline.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

In-Class Participation: 10%
“Briefing Notes” on Selected Philosophical Readings: 20%
Problem Sets in Linguistics: 20%
Seminar Presentation: 20%
Short Essay: 30%

- *Participation*: The course will be run as a seminar. It is thus crucial that all students be present, well-prepared and taking part. This is why there is a participation grade.
- *Problem Sets*: Homework exercises will be assigned as appropriate, to help students more fully grasp the material from 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.
- *Presentation*: Students will be required to lead discussion of one seminar topic. This need not involve anything as formal as a lecture or “PowerPoint” presentation. However, the presenter will be expected not only to explain the structure of the reading and any unfamiliar concepts, but also to provide additional necessary background that cannot be gleaned from the readings themselves.
- *Essay*: The paper should be the sort of thing one could submit to a graduate conference – ideally about 12 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.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Preliminaries

II. Introduction to Generative Linguistics

- A. Foundations [Isac & Reiss, Chaps 1-4]
- B. A Sampling of Phonology and Syntax [Isac & Reiss, Chap 5-7 & 9]

III. Philosophy of Linguistics, Part One: Challenges from Philosophy of Language

- A. Indeterminacy and Eliminativism
 - Quine, Ch. 2 of *Word and Object*
 - Davidson (1986), “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs”
- B. Linguistic Methodology and Ontology
 - Katz (1984), “An Outline of Platonist Grammar”
 - Soames (1984), “Linguistics and Psychology”
 - Devitt and Sterelny (1989), “Linguistics: What’s wrong with ‘The Right View’”.
 - Devitt (2003), “Linguistics is not Psychology”
- C. Externalism
 - Putnam (1975), “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’”
 - Burge (1979), “Individualism and the Mental”

IV. Philosophy of Linguistics, Part Two: Chomsky’s Rebuttals

- A. Chomsky’s New Horizons

- Ch. 1: “New Horizons in the Study of Language”
- Ch. 2: “Explaining Language Use”
- Ch. 3: “Language and Interpretation”
- Ch. 5: “Language as a Natural Object”
- Ch. 6: “Language from an Internalist Perspective”
- B. Further Background: Stainton’s “Two Cents”
 - Stainton (2001), “Communicative Events and Evidence in Linguistics”
 - Iten, Stainton and Wearing (2007), “On Restricting the Evidence Base for Linguistics”
 - Stainton (forthcoming), “The Role of Psychology”
 - Stainton (2006), “Meaning and Reference: Some Chomskyan Themes”

V. *Philosophy and Linguistics: Cases Studies at the Intersection*

- A. Mental Computation and Representation [Jackendoff, Chaps 1 & 2]
- B. Consciousness [Jackendoff, Chap 3]
- C. Action [Jackendoff, Chap 4]
- D. Social Cognition [Jackendoff, Chap 5]

REQUIRED TEXTS:

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

Noam Chomsky (2000). *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ray Jackendoff (2007). *Language, Culture, Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press.