

LPHI 2038: PHILOSOPHY AND LINGUISTICS

Eugene Lang College  
66 W 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Rm. 715

TR: 10:00–11:40

Professor Robin Muller

([robin.muller@gmail.com](mailto:robin.muller@gmail.com); [muller38@newschool.edu](mailto:muller38@newschool.edu))

Office hours: W 2:00–4:00 (6 E. 16<sup>th</sup> St. suite 1028 [Philosophy Department])

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This seminar is a history of the science of language from a philosophical perspective. It seeks, firstly, to examine the major currents of linguistic theory, from its roots in anthropology and comparative philology to its recent incarnation within psychology and cognitive science; secondly, it seeks to address certain philosophically significant questions pertaining to language. These questions include: What is the relationship between language and culture? Between language and the human mind? What is it to be a science of language and what is that science's object? How well equipped are various approaches in linguistics to account for the complexities of meaning? What are the limits of linguistics? As such, this course is both a historical introduction to linguistics and a philosophical consideration of the problem of the study of human language.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This seminar presupposes no *particular* philosophical background. However, a central objective of this course is to examine the philosophical implications of the study of the science of language; for this reason, a basic familiarity with the key problems and concepts of philosophy will be helpful. By the end of this course you should be:

- (1) familiar with major trends in the history of linguistics
- (2) familiar with the major concepts of that history, including
  - a. linguistic relativity
  - b. the arbitrariness of the sign
  - c. structuralism
  - d. generative grammar
  - e. externalist and internalist semantics
  - f. the critique of objectivism
- (3) able to think philosophically about language, especially in its relation to mind and culture.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

You are required to purchase the followings texts, which are available at the 18<sup>th</sup> street Barnes & Noble:

1. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

2. Randy Allen Harris, *The Linguistics Wars*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
3. Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language*, ed. Michael Losonsky, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
4. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (Chicago: Open Court Classics, 1983).

All other required reading material is available on Blackboard (indicated below by an asterisk), though you will be required to bring a hard copy of that reading to class.

#### SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

##### UNIT ONE: WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?

- 8/28: Introduction: Basic problems and basic questions of the science of language  
 8/30: Randy Allen Harris: "Linguistics," in *The Linguistics Wars*, pp. 10–34.

##### UNIT TWO: ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS AND LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

- 9/4: Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Fragments on Recent German Literature [excerpts on language]* in *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 33–64.\*  
 9/6: Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Fragments on Recent German Literature [excerpts on language]* in *Philosophical Writings*, cont'd.  
 9/11: Wilhelm von Humboldt: §§6–10 in *On Language*, pp. 41–80.  
 9/13: Wilhelm von Humboldt: §§11–3 in *On Language*, pp. 81–100.  
 9/18: Wilhelm von Humboldt: §§20, 22 in *On Language*, pp. 148–81, 214–9.  
 9/20: Edward Sapir, "Language and Environment," *American Anthropologist* 14:2 (1912), pp. 226–42,\* and "The Status of Linguistics as a Science," *Language* 5:4 (1929), pp. 207–14.\*  
 9/25: Benjamin Lee Whorf, "Discussion of Hopi Linguistics," and "Science and Linguistics," in *Language, Thought, and Reality*, pp. 102–11, and 207–19.\*

##### UNIT THREE: SAUSSURE AND THE ADVENT OF STRUCTURALISM

- 9/27: Ferdinand de Saussure, "Introduction" to *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 1–37; Émile Benveniste, "'Structure' in Linguistics," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, pp. 79–84.\*  
 10/2: Ferdinand de Saussure, "General Principles," in *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 66–98; Émile Benveniste, "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, pp. 43–8.\*  
 10/4: Ferdinand de Saussure, "Synchronic Linguistics," in *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 99–138.  
 10/9: Ferdinand de Saussure, "Diachronic Linguistics," in *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 139–181.  
 10/11: Émile Benveniste, "Analytical Philosophy and Linguistics," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, pp. 231–8.

##### AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVISM

- 10/16: Leonard Bloomfield, "The Use of Language," in *Language*, pp. 21–42.  
 10/18: Leonard Bloomfield, "Meaning," in *Language*, pp. 139–58.

#### UNIT FIVE: THE CHOMSKYAN REVOLUTION

- 10/23: Noam Chomsky, "Review of *Verbal Behavior*," *Language* 35:1 (1959), pp. 26–58.
- 10/25: Robert E. Lees, "Review of *Syntactic Structure*"; Chomsky, "Syntax and Semantics," in *Syntactic Structure*, pp. 92–106.
- 10/30: Randy Allen Harris, "The Beauty of Deep Structure," in *The Linguistics Wars*, pp. 74–100.
- 11/1: Noam Chomsky, "Preface" and §§1–5 of "Methodological Preliminaries," in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, pp. v–30.
- 11/6: Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*.
- 11/8: Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*, cont'd.

#### UNIT SIX: EXTERNALISM, COGNITIVE SEMANTICS, AND OTHER CHALLENGES TO CHOMSKYANISM

- 11/13: Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of Meaning," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 7 (1975), pp. 131–93.\*
- 11/15: Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of Meaning," cont'd.\*
- 11/20: NO CLASS [classes follow Wednesday schedule]
- 11/22: NO CLASS [Thanksgiving]
- 11/27: John Searle, "A Special Supplement: Chomsky's Revolution in Linguistics," in *The New York Review of Books* 18:12 (June 29, 1972).\*
- George Lakoff, "Deep Language," in *The New York Review of Books*, 20:1 (February 8, 1973).\*
- Noam Chomsky, "Chomsky Replies," in *The New York Review of Books*, 20:12 (July 19, 1973).\*
- 11/29: Gilles Fauconnier, "Cognitive Linguistics," *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*\*
- 12/4: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," *Journal of Philosophy* 77:8 (1980).
- 12/6: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Why Cognitive Linguistics Requires Embodied Realism," *Cognitive Linguistics* 13:2 (2002).
- 12/11: Lakoff and Johnson, cont'd.

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

This course has 4 principal requirements:

Four (4) critical response papers (40%)

These critical response papers should be concise (3–4 page) commentaries on the reading. You will be required to write four of them over the course of the semester. Each commentary must focus on a different unit, although which units and which texts are up to you. The paper is meant to serve as evidence of your ability to understand and analyze the course material. It should demonstrate your familiarity with a text and an ability to identify its major claims. Each commentary must include a short paraphrase of what you take to be the thesis of the text in question, followed by a summary of its argument. The commentary is due on the day in which the text you have chosen is to be discussed (e.g., if you choose to respond to Wilhelm

von Humboldt, §§11–3 in *On Language*, your commentary would be due 9/13).

One (1) seminar presentation (15%)

Each student will be required to give a 10–15 minute presentation of an assigned text. It is not necessary to give a full summary of the text; rather these presentations should focus on what you take to be the major issues, claims, or problems of the reading. On the day of your presentation, you will be responsible for leading class discussion. Students will sign up for presentation dates in the first week of class. N.B. You may not write a critical response paper for the unit in which you are presenting.

One (1) final paper (30%)

Each student is responsible for writing a final paper of 8–10 pages. This paper should be a philosophical, critical engagement with one or more of the texts we read over the course of the semester. A list of suggested topics will be provided later in the semester. Should you wish to write on a topic of your choosing, you must clear it with me in advance.

Attendance and Participation (15%)

Attendance and punctuality are mandatory. More than five (5) absences over the course of the semester may result in failure of the course. Tardiness of more than 10 minutes will count as  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an absence. Please note that I do not distinguish “excused” from “unexcused” absences. Students are expected to come prepared to participate in class discussion, and will be expected to lead that discussion on the day of their presentation.

## COURSE POLICIES

- More than five absences may result in failure of the course.
- Each instance of tardiness (i.e., arriving more than 10 minutes late) will be counted as  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an absence.
- All assignments must be handed in as hard copies; no electronic submissions will be accepted.
- Late assignments will not be accepted.
- All written assignments must be double-spaced, typed in Times New Roman (or similar) font (size 12).
- Plagiarism will not be tolerated. I take to be plagiarism the use of another’s ideas or words without proper attribution. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please visit the following website, or see me: [http://www.plagiarism.org/plag\\_article\\_plagiarism\\_faq.html](http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_plagiarism_faq.html)
- Any student found to be in violation of the plagiarism policy will fail the course and will be reported to the appropriate University authorities.
- Use of the University Writing Center is highly recommended and documented visits may in some instances qualify as extra credit.