

PHILOSOPHY 340
THEORY OF MEANING
University of Chicago, winter 2001

Course Instructor: Jason Bridges

Office hours: Wednesday, 10am-12pm, Harper Memorial E589

DESCRIPTION

In this course we address a group of related philosophical questions about linguistic meaning. What is the relationship between meaning and reference? What is the relationship between meaning and truth? In what sense, if any, is linguistic meaning a mental phenomenon? Are the meanings of a person's words determined entirely by what is going on inside her brain, or do external factors play a role? What is the connection between the meanings of a person's words and her intentions in uttering them? What is the connection between the meanings of a person's words and the shared language to which those words belong? Is meaning essentially social? Is meaning indeterminate? Is there reason for thinking that there is no such thing as meaning at all? Throughout, our aim is to gain a better understanding of the place of the concept of linguistic meaning within larger conceptions of human psychology and action.

Prerequisite: at least one previous course in philosophy or permission from the course instructor.

READINGS

There are three required texts for the course, available for purchase at the Seminary Coop Bookstore (in the basement of 5757 University Ave.):

Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Harvard University Press)
Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Harvard University Press)
Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (Columbia University Press)

Copies of these books will be on reserve at Regenstein.

The remaining course readings are collected in a reading packet, available for purchase at the Humanities Copy Center (on the first floor of Classics).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

First paper:	3 pages	due February 1 st	worth 25% of course grade
Second paper:	5 pages	due February 18 th	worth 35%
Final paper:	7 pages	due March 12 th	worth 40%

There is no final exam.

All papers are due by 5pm on the assigned day in Professor Bridges' teaching box in Classics 17. Late papers will be docked a grade per day (e.g., B+ to B) unless you have received approval ahead of time.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS
(Dates are tentative.)

Week 1

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
Th 1/3	Course overview	

Part I: Two approaches to meaning

Week 2

Tu 1/8	Communication-intention theories of speaker's meaning	Grice, "Meaning" <u>Optional</u> : Grice, excerpt from "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions"
Th 1/10	Davidson-style formal theories of meaning	Class handout

Week 3

Tu 1/15	Formal theory at work: definite descriptions	Class handout
Th 1/17	Do formal theories of meaning go deep enough?	Strawson, "Meaning and Truth"

Week 4:

Tu 1/22	Davidson on interpretation	Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning" and "Radical Interpretation"
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Part II: Language, thought and social practice

Th 1/24	Kripke against descriptivism, part one	Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , pp. 24-32, bottom of 47 to top of 49, 57-78
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Week 5:

Tu 1/29	Kripke against descriptivism, part two	Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , pp. 78-97 <u>Optional</u> : Evans, "Proper Names"
Th 1/31	Burge's argument for anti-individualism	Burge, excerpt from "Individualism and the Mental"

Week 6:

Tu 2/5	Narrow content	Loar, "Social Content and Psychological Content"
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Part III: The ontological status of natural languages

Th: 2/7	Languages as conventional	Schiffer, "Utterance-Meaning and Convention"
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Week 7:

Tu 2/12	The primacy of the idiolect	Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs"
Th 2/14	Languages as social objects	Wiggins, "Languages as Social Objects"

Part IV: Doubts about meaning

Week 8:

Tu 2/19	The indeterminacy of reference, part one	Quine, "Ontological Relativity", in <i>Ontological Relativity and other Essays</i> Quine, from <i>Pursuit of Truth</i>
Th 2/21	The indeterminacy of reference, part two	Stroud, "Quine on Exile and Acquiescence"

Week 9:

Tu 2/26	Semantic irrealism, part one	Kripke, <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i> , pp. 7-51
Th 2/28	Semantic irrealism, part two	Kripke, <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i> , pp. 51-54

Week 10:

Tu 3/5	(Slack)	
Th 3/7	NO CLASS (reading period)	