

Mind, Matter, and Language

Lecture 1: Introduction

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University of Edinburgh

Course info

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This course is an introduction to some of the central problems and concepts in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind.

First half: philosophy of language

Second half: philosophy of mind

Course info

Week (beginning)	Topic	Core Reading
Week 1 (16 Sept)	Words and their meanings (Schwarz)	Paul Grice, "Meaning" (1957) Gottlob Frege, "Function and Concept" (1891)
Week 2 (23 Sept)	Frege on sense and reference (Schwarz)	Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference" (1892)
Week 3 (30 Sept)	Russell on descriptions (Schwarz)	Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting" (1905)
Week 4 (7 Oct)	Knowledge of meanings (Schwarz)	Sally Haslanger, "What Good are Our Intuitions?" (2006)
Week 5 (14 Oct)	Doing things with words (Schwarz)	Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (1953), §1-38 Mary Kate McGowan, "Oppressive Speech" (2009)
Week 6 (21 Oct)	The Mind-Body Problem and Dualism (Fletcher)	Margaret Wilson, "the Epistemological Argument for Mind-Body Distinctness" (1976)
Week 7 (28 Oct)	Physicalism and Identity Theory (Fletcher)	Barbara Montero, "The Body Problem" (1999) J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes" (1959)
Week 8 (4 Nov)	Functionalism (Fletcher)	John R. Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (1980, 417-424) Margaret A. Boden, "Escaping from the Chinese Room" (1988)
Week 9 (11 Nov)	The Knowledge Argument against Physicalism (Fletcher)	David Lewis, "What Experience Teaches" (1989)
Week 10 (18 Nov)	Conceivability Arguments against Physicalism (Fletcher)	Janet Levin, "Do Conceivability Arguments against Physicalism beg the Question?" (2012)
Week 11 (25 Nov)	Review Week (Schwarz/Fletcher)	

Expectations

1. You come to the lectures.
2. You come to your tutorials.
3. Before each tutorial, you work through the core reading(s) and answer the questions on Learn.

You can find links to the core readings on Learn, under “Readings”, or on <https://www.wolfgangsschwarz.net/mml>.

Laptop policy

If you use a laptop, please sit at the back of the room.

Assessment

- Mid-term essay
 - 1500 word essay answering a question from an agreed list of questions.
 - All questions on philosophy of language, released early October
 - Due 6 November by noon
 - 25% of the overall assessment mark.
- End of semester examination
 - Two-hour examination given under exam conditions
 - 1/4 philosophy of language, 3/4 philosophy of mind
 - Date, time and place to be announced later in the term
 - 75% of the overall assessment mark.

Getting in touch

- **Questions about the content of lectures or readings:** Ask in your tutorial group or visit the relevant lecturer during office hour.
- **Administrative questions about deadlines, word limits, absences, etc.:** ask the course secretary, Alison Lazda (philinfo@ed.ac.uk)

Philosophy of language

Philosophy of language reflects on the nature and use of language.

- By uttering noises or writing down scribbles, we can share information, give instructions, book holidays, arrange dates, give consent, etc. How is that possible?
- How can we understand sentences we've never encountered before?
- What would you have to teach a computer to teach it a language?
- Does our language affect how we think about the world? Is it possible to think without language? Are there things that can't be said?

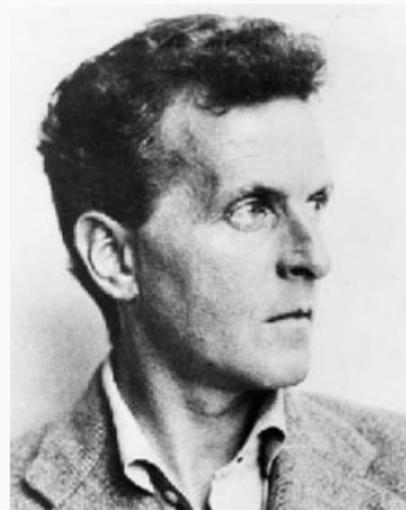
Scrutinizing language is important to other parts of philosophy.

All philosophy is “critique of language”.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, TLP (1921), 4.0031

Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, PI (1953), §109



Meaning and communication

A remarkable fact:

People who speak the same language can communicate information by uttering sentences of their shared language.

A person wants to warn another about dangerous quicksand.

- She could throw a rock at the relevant place and demonstrate how it sinks.
- ...
- She could produce the sounds 'وعث رمل سيار'.

What is the connection between 'وَعَثَ رَمْلَ سَيَارٍ' and the presence of quicksand?

We have a word for the connection:

'وَعَثَ رَمْلَ سَيَارٍ' **means** that there is quicksand around.

Meaning and communication

Meaning connects sounds and scribbles with the (rest of the) world.

‘وعث زمل سيار’ —



‘it’s raining’ —



But what does this connection consist in? How does it come about?

Paul Grice (1957) distinguishes two kinds of meaning.

Natural meaning

- The spots on his face mean that he has measles.
- The rings on the stump mean that the tree was over 100 years old.

Non-natural meaning

- 'وَعَثَ رَمْلٌ سَيَّارٌ' means that there is quicksand around.
- Three rings on the bell mean that the bus is full.



Natural meaning is independent of us and what we think or do.

Non-natural meaning somehow arises from what people in the relevant community think and do.

So what makes 'وَعَثَ رَمْلٌ سَيَّارٌ' mean that quicksand is present?

To a first approximation, it's arguably this:

1. Speakers generally try to utter 'وَعَثَ رَمْلٌ سَيَّارٌ' only when quicksand is present.
2. Hearers generally assume that quicksand is present when someone utters 'وَعَثَ رَمْلٌ سَيَّارٌ'.

1. Speakers generally try to utter 'وَعَثَ رَمْلَ سَيَارُ' only when quicksand is present.
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This is a **conventional link** between 'وَعَثَ رَمْلَ سَيَارُ' and the presence of quicksand.

The same kind of link holds in the English-speaking community between

- 'it's raining' and the presence of rain,
- 'I'm hungry' and the speaker being hungry,
- etc.

The template: S means p because

1. speakers generally try to utter S only if p ;
2. hearers generally assume that p if someone utters S .

To understand a language, you have to know **which** sentences are conventionally linked to **which** states of affairs.



Man overboard.



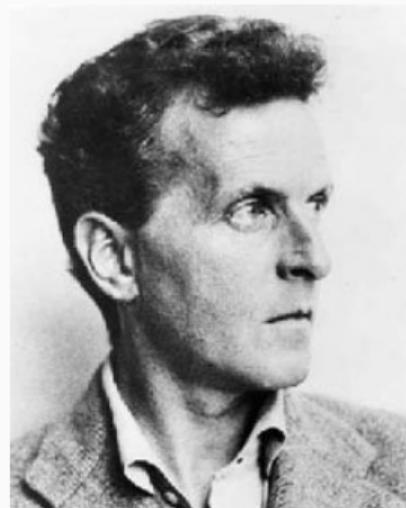
My ship is stopped.



I require medical assistance.

Understanding a sentence means knowing what is the case if the sentence is true.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, TLP (1921), 4.024



Summary

- We can communicate information by uttering sounds because there is a conventional link between the sounds and possible states of affairs.
- Because of this link, the sounds **mean** that the relevant state obtains; the sounds are **true** iff the state obtains.
- Roughly, the conventional link consists in a disposition to utter the sounds only when the corresponding state obtains, and to assume that the state obtains if the sounds are uttered.

The rationality of communication

The rationality of communication

Let's have a closer look at the conventional link between signs S and their meaning p .

1. People generally produce S only if p ;
2. People generally assume that p if someone produces S .

By these criteria,

- carrying an umbrella conventionally means that it is raining.

The rationality of communication

Vervet monkeys communicate the presence of predators by making

- low pitched grunts when they see an eagle,
- high pitched chutters when they see a snake,
- short tonal calls when they see a leopard.

Why do they do this? Maybe it's an innate reflex.

That's not how human language works.



Suppose I utter 'it is raining', whereupon you come to believe that it is raining.

- **Why is it reasonable for you to acquire that belief?**

Because you recognize that by uttering the sounds I want you to acquire the belief, and you have reason to trust me.

- **Why is it reasonable for me to utter those sounds?**

Because I have reason to expect that you will recognize that I want you to acquire the belief by uttering the sounds.

The rationality of communication

When a speaker conveys information P by means of an utterance, then normally

- (1) the speaker wants the hearer to believe P ;
- (2) the speaker wants the hearer to recognize the intention in (1);
- (3) the speaker wants that the hearer believes P because she recognizes the intention in (1).



The rationality of communication

Earlier we assumed that S conventionally means p iff

- (1) people generally produce S only if p ;
- (2) people generally assume that p if someone produces S .

A Gricean alternative: S conventionally means p iff

people generally produce S only if they intend that the recipient acquires the belief that p by recognizing this intention.