

PHIL145 Language and Communication (Language, Power, and Oppression)

Spring 2019
MWF 10:10-11:00am | Bingham Hall 101

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Office Hours: MW 11:00am-12:00pm and by appointment

Content Warning

Some of the topics and materials discussed in this course might be difficult for students from a variety of backgrounds. (These topics include but are not limited to: explicit mentioning of slurs and derogatory terms, depiction and discussion of sexual harassment, rape, and pornography.) If you have any concerns about any elements of the course, or if there is any way that we can together make things easier to bear, please contact me by email, by Zoom, or in person.

Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course; all readings will be made available on Sakai.

1. Course Description

In this course, we will explore the power of language in shaping our thoughts and reality, with a special focus on oppressive (mainly racist and sexist) speech. There are four units:

Unit 1: Language, Thoughts, and Reality. We'll begin by exploring how language shapes our thoughts and reality. Specifically, we'll look at how it functions to reinforce structural oppression. For instance, how might our use of language contribute to the marginalization of women and trans people?

Unit 2. Meaning and Speech Act. We'll discuss philosophical theories of meaning and speech act theories. What is it for a sentence to be meaningful? What is conversational implicature? What are the different types of speech acts? Is pornography a speech act?

Unit 3: Bullshit, Jokes, and Slurs. We'll apply the theories that we've learned in the previous units to understand the nature of bullshit, jokes, and slurs. What is bullshit? What makes a joke racist or sexist? Does it make it less funny? What constitutes racial and gendered slurs?

Unit 4: Epistemic Injustice and Subordinating Speech. We'll return to the idea of language shaping our thoughts and reality. The final unit addresses the topic of epistemic oppression, silencing, and subordinating speech. How are some language users systematically oppressed? Should hate speech be free speech?

2. Learning Objectives

This course has three learning objectives.

- You'll be introduced to **key topics, ideas, and theories** in philosophy of language, as well as ethical, social and legal issues arising from these topics.
- You'll practice **key philosophical skills**, including: identifying and critically evaluating different perspectives on a complicated issue, forming your own views based on such evaluation, and clearly communicating your views in writing and in speech with interlocutors who may have different or opposing opinions while engaging in respectful dialogue.
- You'll reflect on how the topics that we've discussed in class relate to **issues outside of the classroom** and form your own views on those issues.

3. Commitment to Respect and Diversity

Together as a class, we are fully committed to creating a safe learning environment for everyone involved, irrespective of their ability, age, economic status, ethnicity, first language, gender expression and identity, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexuality. Personal offenses or discriminatory remarks toward others on any of these bases will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

During the semester, we will have *anonymous climate surveys* to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and respected during class discussions and lectures. If you have any concerns about the learning environment at any time during the semester, please do not hesitate to let me know.

4. Course Assignments and Assessment

The requirements for this course are as follows.

Due Date	Assignment	Percentage
Daily	Attendance & Participation	10%
Daily	Reading Responses	20%
2/22	Quiz (Unit 1-2)	10%
2/15	Paper I Draft (2-3 pages)	5%
3/8	Paper I Rewrite (3-4 pages)	15%
4/15	Paper II (5-6 page)	20%
4/29	Final Exam (Unit 1-4)	20%

Attendance & Participation (10%)

You will meet this requirement in part by attending class regularly. But you will also need to regularly participate in discussions and in-class activities to get full points. There will be *alternative* ways of earning participation points; we will discuss a specific guideline for these assignments in class.

In class, I will occasionally “cold-call” you and ask if you would like to share your thoughts. You can always feel free to “skip” a particular question or “opt-out” of being cold-called at any point during the semester for an entire class, a unit, or the rest of the semester.

In the mid-semester, I will release an *estimate* of your participation grade—this does not count toward your overall grade and only serves to give you a sense of how you have been doing so far. If what you see is not the grade you expected or wanted, come talk to me and we will discuss the ways to boost your grade!

Reading Responses (20%)

We’ll begin nearly every class by writing individual responses to the assigned reading. There may be a reading response given on a day when there’s no new reading. You’ll need to bring paper and something to write with to complete these. The aim is to give you an incentive to do the readings on time and to come to class.

There will be 23 in total, which I’ll grade pass/fail. I’ll drop your lowest 3, and the remaining 20 will count toward your grade. You’ll fail the reading response if it’s clear that you failed to properly do the reading. You’ll pass the reading response if it’s clear that you properly did the reading.

Quiz (10%)

After the first two units, there will be an in-class quiz. The purpose is to consolidate your background knowledge of theories of meaning and speech act theories before moving forward. This quiz will require you to answer short-answer questions from the readings in Unit 1 and 2.

Paper I (5%)

Writing philosophy papers is difficult, especially if you’ve never done it before. So, your first paper counts only for a small portion of your grade. I will give you extensive comments and then you’ll have an opportunity to rewrite it. This paper should be 2–3 pages in length.

Paper I Rewrite (15%)

This paper should be 3–4 pages in length, giving you some room to expand on and improve the first effort in the light of my feedback. You should still submit this paper for anonymous grading.

Paper II (20%)

This paper should be 5–6 pages in length. I’ll give you a list of prompts, but you can also choose your own topic subject to my approval.

Final Exam (20%)

The exam will require you to answer both short-answer and essay questions from Unit 1 through 4. There will be a review session on the last day of classes. A detailed guideline will be posted on Sakai.

5. Grading and Other Class Policies

Each assignment will be marked out of the number of percentage points that it contributes to your overall grade. This will give you a total score of 100, which I'll convert to your final letter grade:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
94	90	87	84	80	77	74	70	67	60	0-59

For papers, I'll also give you a corresponding letter grade. We'll look at grading criteria closer to the due dates, but here's a rough description of what these letter grades signify¹:

A: “*Mastery* of course content at the *highest level* of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development.”

B: “*Strong* performance demonstrating a *high level* of attainment for a student at a given stage of development.”

C: “A *totally acceptable* performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development.”

D: “A *marginal* performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment [at a given stage of development].”

F: “For whatever reason, an *unacceptable* performance [at a given stage of development].”

Pluses and minuses will be given to papers that fall in between these descriptions

Anonymous Grading

I will grade the papers and the final exam *anonymously*. This means that you shouldn't put any identifying information on them, other than your PID number. Make sure to include your PID number *both* in the body of your paper *and* in the file name.

Late Policy

Each paper is due at **5pm** sharp on the dates indicated below.

You are given “three late days” that you can freely use on any of the paper assignments (not applicable to reading responses, quiz, or the final exam). You can use all three days on a single assignment, or spread them out on several assignments. (For instance, you may turn in Paper I three

¹ These descriptions are from UNC's official “Explanation of Grading System” (<https://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/grades/explanation-of-grading-system/>).

days late, or turn in Paper I an hour late and Paper II two days late without getting a late penalty. Turning in an assignment an hour late will use up a whole late day.) You don't have to tell me in advance, and I won't ask any questions! If you submit the paper late, I will simply deduct the day(s) from the remaining late days you have.

Once you have used up the late days, late papers will be docked a full letter grade (10%) for each calendar day (or part of a day) that they are late. (For instance, a paper due on a Friday that is turned in on Saturday by 11:59pm will be docked a full letter grade.) So, use the late days wisely!

You may earn an additional extension beyond the three late days given, if you make a reasonable request for an extension *at least 72 hours in advance* of the paper due date.

Page Limit Policy

Paper I rewrite and Paper II are subject to strict page limits. To standardize length, all submissions should be: 12pt font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. If you have a nonstandard formatting, I will convert it to standard formatting to check for length.

I will dock a third of a letter grade for each third of a page you are over or under the required page range: 3-4 pages for the Rewrite and 5-6 pages for Paper II (excluding the reference list).

Electronics

Electronics—laptops and tablets, but no phones—are allowed in class for accessing the electronic copies of the readings and note-taking. Please note that I reserve the right to rescind this permission if they become of a distraction. Whether you bring a laptop to class or not, you should bring paper and something to write with in order to complete in-class exercises and activities.

No recording devices are permitted for the classroom use. Exceptions can be made with a request from the Accessibility Resources & Services Office.

Plagiarism and the Honor Code

You are expected to abide by UNC's Honor Code, and refrain from any kind of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism. At UNC, plagiarism is defined as "deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise." This includes *unintentionally* stealing another person's work or failing to give credit to someone else's idea *by accident*.

Just as you are bound by the Honor Code not to plagiarize, I am bound by it to report suspected cases of academic dishonesty of any kind to the Honor Court. If you are ever in any doubt as to whether something constitutes plagiarism, check with me first!

6. Resources

Accommodations

If you need special accommodations for class assignments, please register with the Accessibility Resources & Service Office (<https://ars.unc.edu/>). Once I receive an official request from the ARS Office, I'd be happy to make the arrangements!

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS (<https://caps.unc.edu/>) is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, both for short-term and long-term needs.

Writing Center

To ensure the anonymous grading, I will not read the paper drafts. But you can always set up an appointment with one of the coaches at the UNC Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/>) to improve your paper at any stages of writing—from brainstorming to polishing a full draft.

Title IX Resources

Any students impacted by acts of discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, stalking, and related retaliation are encouraged to report the incident and seek resources on campus or in the community.

Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Rebecca Gibson: rmgibson@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential: caps@unc.edu), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (confidential: gvsc@unc.edu) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at <https://safe.unc.edu/>.

7. Reading Schedule (Subject to change)

Date	Topic	Reading / Assignment
1/9 (Wed) Week 1	Introduction	None
1/11 (Fri) Week 1		Course Syllabus <i>Ted talk</i> : Boroditsky, “How language shapes the way we think” (2017) Frye, “Oppression” in <i>The Politics of Reality</i> (1983)

Unit One. Language, Thoughts and Reality		
1/14 (Mon) Week 2	Language, Thoughts and Reality	Spender, "Language and Reality: Who Made the World?" in <i>Man Made Language</i> (1985)
1/16 (Wed) Week 2		Hofstadter, "A Person Paper on Purity in Language" (1986) Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" (2000)
1/18 (Fri) Week 2	Discussion	None
1/21 (Mon) Week 3	<i>Holiday – no class!</i>	None
1/23 (Wed) Week 3	LTR, cont'd.	Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Women'" (2013) NYT: Burkett, "What Makes a Woman?" & Responses to Burkett (2015)
1/25 (Fri) Week 3		MacKinnon, "A Rally on Rape" and "Sex and Violence" in <i>Feminism Unmodified</i> (1987)
1/28 (Mon) Week 4	Discussion	None
1/30 (Wed) Week 4	LTR, cont'd.	<i>Ted talk:</i> Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality" (2016) Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" and "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in <i>Sister Outsider</i> (1984)
2/1 (Fri) Week 4	<i>Paper Writing Workshop I</i>	None
Unit Two. Meaning and Speech Act		
2/4 (Mon) Week 5	Meaning	Grice, "Meaning" (1957) (Optional) Lycan, Ch.6 and 7 in <i>Philosophy of Language</i> (2000)
2/6 (Wed) Week 5	Conversational Implicature	Grice, "Logic and Conversation" (1975)
2/8 (Fri) Week 5	Discussion	None
2/11 (Mon) Week 6	Speech Act	Austin, Lecture 1 and 2 in <i>How to Do Things with Words</i> (1962) (Optional) Lycan, Ch.12 in <i>PL</i> (2000)
2/13 (Wed) Week 6		Austin, Lecture 8 and 9 in <i>How to Do Things with Words</i> (1962)
2/15 (Fri) Week 6	Discussion	None Paper I due!
2/18 (Mon) Week 7	Pornography as Speech Act	Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts" (1993) (Optional) MacKinnon, "Francis Biddle's Sister: Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech" in <i>FU</i> (1987)
2/20 (Wed) Week 7		Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts" (1993), cont'd.

2/22 (Fri) Week 7	<i>Quiz Day</i>	None	Quiz (Unit 1-2)!
2/25 (Mon) Week 8	<i>Class Debate on Pornography</i>	None	
Unit Three. Bullshit, Jokes and Slurs			
2/27 (Wed) Week 8	Bullshit	Frankfurt, "On Bullshit" (1988)	
3/1 (Fri) Week 8	<i>Paper Writing Workshop II</i>	None	
3/4 (Mon) Week 9	Racist and Sexist Jokes	Philips, "Racist Acts and Racist Humor" (1984) Anderson, "Racist Humor" (2015)	
3/6 (Wed) Week 9		Bergmann, "How Many Feminists Does It Take to Make a Joke?" (1986)	
3/8 (Fri) Week 9	Discussion	None	Paper I Rewrite due!
3/11 – 3/15 Week 10	<i>Spring break – no class!</i>	None	
3/18 (Mon) Week 11	Jokes, cont'd.	Smuts, "The Ethics of Humor: Can Your Sense of Humor be Wrong?" (2010)	
3/20 (Wed) Week 11	Discussion	None	
3/22 (Fri) Week 11	Slurs	Anderson and Lepore, "Slurs as Prohibited Words" (2013)	
3/25 (Mon) Week 12	Slurs	Ashwell, "Gendered Slurs" (2016)	
3/27 (Wed) Week 12	Discussion	None	
3/29 (Fri) Week 12	<i>Review Session</i>	None	
Unit Four. Epistemic Injustice and Subordinating Speech			
4/1 (Mon) Week 13	Epistemic Injustice	Fricker, Chapter 1 and 2 in <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> (2007)	
4/3 (Wed) Week 13		Fricker, Chapter 7 in <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> (2007)	
4/5 (Fri) Week 13	Discussion	None	
4/8 (Mon) Week 14	Silencing	Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing" (2011)	
4/10 (Wed) Week 14	Silencing Speech	Langton and Hornsby, "Free Speech and Illocution" (1998)	
4/12 (Fri) Week 14	Discussion	None	

4/15 (Mon) Week 15	Subordinating Speech	Maitra, "Subordinating Speech" in <i>Speech and Harm</i> (2012) Paper II due!
4/17 (Wed) Week 15	Hate Speech	McGowan, "On "Whites Only" Signs and Racist Hate Speech: Verbal Acts of Racial Discrimination" in <i>SH</i> (2012)
4/19 (Fri) Week 15	<i>Holiday – no class!</i>	None
4/22 (Mon) Week 16	Microaggressions	Fatima, "On the Edge of Knowing: Microaggression and Epistemic Uncertainty as a Woman of Color" (2017) <i>The Atlantic</i> : Lukianoff and Haidt, "The Coddling of the American Mind" (2015) (Optional) Campbell and Manning, "Microaggression and Moral Cultures" (2014)
4/24 (Wed) Week 16	Discussion	None
Exam Preparation		
4/26 (Fri) Week 16	<i>Review Session II</i>	None
4/29 (Mon) Week 17	<i>Final Exam – 8:00-11:00am at Bingham Hall 101</i>	