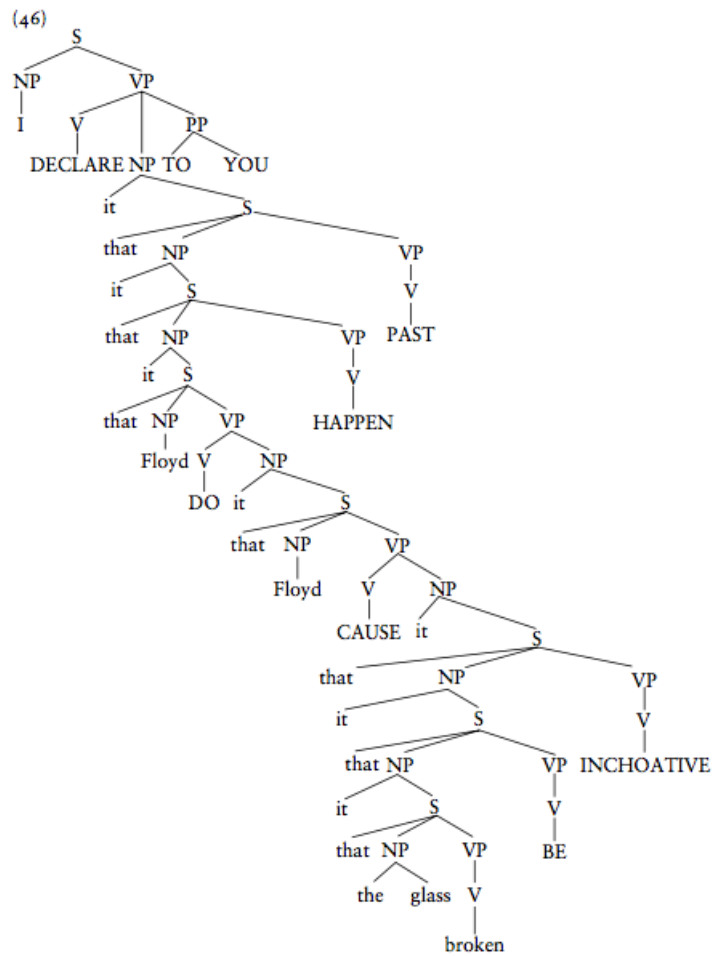# Philosophy of Linguistics

Gabe Dupre

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Course Overview

The latter half of the 20th Century saw linguistic science develop enormously, probably more than it had in the entire preceding millennia. Central to these developments was the incorporation of precise formal tools for describing the rules of natural languages. We will focus on such an application within the fields of syntax, the study of linguistic structure, and semantics, the study of linguistic meaning.

After describing some of the basic structure of explanations within these fields, we will turn to the philosophical questions underlying them:

- What is a language? Is it an abstract object, a psychological object, or a social phenomenon?

- How is a language acquired? Is it largely innately given, or is it learned from the environment?

- What is the relationship between data and theory in linguistics?

- What is linguistic meaning?

Course Materials

There will be no official textbook for the course. All of the required readings will be available digitally through the course webpage. Please check the course website regularly for updates.

Some background in linguistics, especially syntax or semantics, would help, but is not required. Some familiarity with formal logic will be presupposed.

Course Requirements

1. **Paper 1:** 40% of final grade.

2. **Final Paper Essay Plan:** 5% of final grade.

3. **Final Paper:** 55% of final grade.

4. **Be familiar with and abide by UCLA's policy on Academic Integrity:** This policy can be found at http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Academic-Integrity

5. **Late assignments:** Late papers will be docked by 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hour period after the due date. There will be no credit for late essay plans. Extensions may be granted by your TA if they deem you to have a valid reason.

Course Papers

You will be assigned two papers, in increasing order of length and difficulty. Your TA will provide detailed feedback on these papers. In order to do well in this course, you will need to incorporate this feedback into later work.

Paper 1

A prompt, with options, for paper 1 will be assigned in week 5, to be submitted in week 7. This paper will involve you describing a debate we have looked at and explaining which side of the debate seems most plausible to you.

Final Paper

For the final paper, the topic will not be assigned (although the TA and I are willing to help you find one). Once you have settled on a topic, you must check with me or your TA that this topic is suitable. As this paper is the largest chunk of your grade of any single piece of work, it is <u>highly</u> recommended that you start thinking about this paper fairly early in the course, and begin discussions with me or your TA no later than the beginning of week 8. An essay plan must be produced for your TA by Midnight on Friday of Week 10.

Reading Schedule

Readings marked with a '*' are recommended, but not required.

Unit 1: Introduction. Syntactic and Semantic Theory

- Excerpts from Larson, R. *Grammar as Science* (2009)

- Excerpts from Chomsky, N. *Aspects of a Theory of Syntax* (1965)

- Excerpts from Heim, I. and Kratzer, A. *Semantics in Generative Grammar* (1998)

- * Higginbotham, J. *Some Philosophy of Language*, in Gleitman, Liberman, M. L., Osherson, D. eds. *An Invitation to Cognitive Science vol. 1* (1995)

Unit 2: The Metaphysics of Language

- Fodor, J.A. *Some Notes on what Linguistics is About*, in Block, N. ed. *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology vol. 2* (1981)

- Devitt, M. and Sterelny, K. *What's Wrong with "the Right View"?* (1989)

- Katz, J. *An Outline of Platonist Grammar* (1984)

- Wilson, D. *The Mapping Between the Mental and the Public Lexicon* (2012)

* Soames, S. *Linguistics and Psychology* (1984)

* Excerpts from Kripke, S. *Naming and Necessity* (1980)

* Excerpts from Chomsky, N. *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (2000)

• Stainton, R. *Language and Community* in *Philosophical Perspectives on Language* (1996)

* Stainton, R. *In Defense of Public Languages* (2012)

• Kaplan, D. *Words* (1990)

* Rey, G. *The Non-Existence of Language, - - But not Cars* (2006)

Unit 3: Nativism and Empiricism

• Pietroski, P. and Crain, S. *The Language Faculty* (2012)

* Crain, S. and Pietroski, P. *Nature, Nurture and Universal Grammar* (2001)

* Fodor, J.D. and Crowther, C. *Understanding Stimulus Poverty Arguments* (2002)

• Excerpts from Cowie, F. *What's Within? Nativism Reconsidered* (1998)

• Fodor, J.A. *Doing Without What's Within. Fiona Cowie's Critique of Nativism* (2001)

• Excerpts from Tomasello, M. *Constructing a Language* (2009)

* Excerpts from Elman, J., Karmiloff-Smith, A., Bates, E., Johnson, M., Parisi, D. and Plunkett, K. *Rethinking Innateness* (1996)

Unit 4: Data and Theory in Linguistics 1: Intuitions

• Excerpts from Schütze, C. *The Empirical Basis of Linguistics* (2016)

• Santana, C. *Linguistic Intuitions are not Scientific Evidence* in *Evidence and Formal Models in the Linguistic Sciences* (2016)

* Ludlow, P. *Data, Intuitions, Judgements* in *The Philosophy of Generative Grammar* (2013)

• Excerpts from Devitt, M. *Ignorance of Language* (2006)

• Fitzgerald, G. *Linguistic Intuitions* (2010)

Unit 5: Data and Theory in Linguistics 2: Competence/Performance and Core/Periphery

• Pylyshyn, Z. *The Role of Competence Theories in Cognitive Psychology* (1973)

* Excerpts from Tomasello, M. *Constructing a Language* (2009)

• Jackendoff, R. *Representations and Rules in Language* (2018)

* Ibbotson, P. *The Scope of Usage-Based Theory* (2013)

• Dupre, G. *Linguistics and the Explanatory Economy* (m.s.)

Unit 6: Meaning

• Lewis, D. *General Semantics* (1970)

• Burge, T. *Wherein is Language Social?* (1989)

• Wikforss, A. *Semantic Externalism and Psychological Externalism* (2007)

* Chomsky, N. *Internalist Explorations* (2003)

• Pietroski, P. *The Character of Natural Language Semantics* (2003)

* Collins, J. *The Copredication Argument* (2017)

• Travis, C. *On What is Strictly Speaking True* (1985)

• Excerpts from Borg, E. *Minimal Semantics* (2004)

* Excerpts from Predelli, S. *Contexts: Meaning, Truth and the Use of Language* (2009)