

**Philosophy of the Social Sciences:
The Fundamental Role of Language**
PhD/MA level
7.5 / 15 credits
Autumn 2021

General presentation

It is considered a truism that a well-functioning language is a crucial tool for successful communication in all walks of life.

However, the fact that language to a large extent influences the way we conceive ourselves, others, society and the surrounding inorganic as well as organic reality and thus the various social and natural sciences is neither a well-established view, nor properly understood.

The aim of this course is to rectify this deficiency by a careful study of the nature and function of language; showing how it influences the way the social sciences develop, i.e. how conceptions of language shape the fundamental ideas in the philosophy of the social sciences.

Answers to questions of the similarities/differences between the natural and social sciences; the nature of objectivity and explanations in the social sciences; the role of values and interpretations (hermeneutics) in the social sciences and a number of related questions all rely on (too often unconscious and therefore unexamined) assumptions on the nature and function of language.

We will start with an historical overview of the most important/influential conceptions of language, focusing on the major contributions during the 20th century (Wittgenstein, Chomsky/Fodor, Taylor) and continue with a discussion of how these different conceptions/theories of language effect the main conceptual issues/questions in some of the social sciences (psychology, sociology, social anthropology, political science, economics, social work, education, gender studies and communication studies).

Course outline/seminars (4 hours; mostly on Wednesdays 10-14)

Seminar 1 (8/9). General presentation of course content, literature, assignments. Presentation of participants and their MA/PhD areas/topics.

Seminar 2 (15/9). The Fundamental Role of Language; An historical overview: Hobbes, Locke, Herder, Humboldt, Wittgenstein, Chomsky/Fodor and Taylor.

Seminar 3 (22/9). Wittgenstein's two conceptions of language (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*).

Seminar 4 (29/9). Application of Wittgenstein: (1) Language acquisition and (2) Cognitive Science. Student presentations.

Seminar 5 (13/10). Chomsky/Fodor on language and thought.

Seminar 6 (27/10). Application of Chomsky/Fodor: (1) Evolutionary psychology and culture and (2) the utilitarian-rationalistic approach to society. Student presentations.

Seminars 7-8 (10/11 and 24/11). Charles Taylor on language: criticism of the established tradition and presentation of his expressivist conception of linguistic capacity.

Seminar 9 (8/12). Application of Charles Taylor: (1) Values and ethics (2) Objectivity (3) Identity. Student presentations.

Seminar 10 (15/12). Evaluation of the discussed approaches: Which account is most fruitful for the social sciences? Student presentations.

Seminars 11-12 (10/1 and 11/1, 2022). Final papers: presentation and discussion.

Student presentations and final papers are expected to explore areas of student interest and research. Thus, in addition to the reading list, students will, with the suggestion and approval of the course director, choose relevant literature from their field of specialization (approximately 150/300 pages).