



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Philosophy of Language

2627-1-E2006P002

Learning area

1: Linguistic and communicative processes and related cultural contexts.

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding

- Distinctive features of human language.
- Similarities and differences between human and animal communication.
- Theoretical and experimental approaches to the relationship between language and thought (and culture).

Ability to apply knowledge and understanding.

- Ability to reflect on language and communication.
- Ability to evaluate statements about language (e.g., regarding its persuasive or offensive power).
- Ability to critically read scientific articles, and evaluate experimental studies.

Autonomy of judgment

- Development of the ability to judge the impact of specific linguistic formulations on decisions and behavior.
- Development of the ability to evaluate experimental methodologies and interpretations of data.

Communication skills

- Enhancement of the ability to communicate content clearly and effectively, taking into account the impact that specific linguistic formulations can have on opinion formation and behavior adoption.

- Acquisition of awareness of how certain linguistic expressions may be perceived as offensive or discriminatory.

Learning skills

Development of the ability to pursue education independently, with critical awareness.

Contents

The first part of the course will explore the relationship between language and communication, focusing in particular on the distinctive features of human language that set it apart from other forms of animal communication.. The second part of the course focusses on the relationship between language and thought: We will investigate if, and to what extent, speaking a certain language may impact on conceptualization and on behaviour.

Detailed program

- Language and communication
- Animal communication
- Hypotheses about the origin of language
- Language and thought
- Experimental studies that investigate whether particular linguistic expressions impact on thought in the following areas:
 1. Attributing stereotypically masculine/feminine properties to noun referents in languages that use morphological gender marking.
 2. Focusing on the "form" or on the "substance" of objects depending on the presence of count nouns / mass nouns in one's language.
 3. Perceiving or not perceiving color nuances depending on whether one's language has a more or less rich lexical repertoire for referring to colors.
 4. Strategies for spatial orientation depending on the linguistic expressions available in one's language.
 5. Temporal conception depending on the type of spatial metaphors used to refer to time.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites.

Teaching methods

The course has 56 hours of lectures, which will be delivered mainly as in-person lecture-based classes (transmission of content). During lectures, students are encouraged to participate actively. Some topics of the course will be covered with interactive activities, such as case studies, exercises to apply theoretical notions to practice, with the aim of encouraging students to critically process the proposed topics, and also use them to read reality. Indicatively, there will be 42 hours of in-person lecture-based classes and 14 hours of interactive lessons.

The course is taught in Italian.

Assessment methods

The exam is written, with multiple choice questions, open questions and exercises.

The forced choice questions aim at ascertaining the effective acquisition of theoretical notions; open questions require the ability to assess, synthesize and evaluate theoretical debates, and to critically read scientific articles; exercises require to apply the theoretical notions taught during lessons to analyze conversational exchanges.

The evaluation criteria are the correctness of the answers, the ability to argue, synthesize, create links, and critically read what was learned.

The evaluation will be based on the following criteria:

30 with honors: excellent performance, both in terms of knowledge and critical and expressive articulation

30: very good performance, comprehensive knowledge, well-articulated and correctly expressed

27–29: good performance, thorough and satisfactory knowledge, essentially correct expression

24–26: Fair performance; knowledge present on key points but not comprehensive and not always correctly articulated

21–23: Sufficient performance; knowledge present but sometimes superficial; expression and articulation lacking and not always appropriate

18–21: Barely sufficient performance; knowledge present but superficial; expression and articulation of the argument with gaps, some of which are significant

< 18: Insufficient performance; knowledge is absent or very patchy; lack of orientation in the subject

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Teaching resources will be indicated on the e-learning page.

Although this course is held in Italian, for international students, course material can also be available in English, and students can take the exam in English if they wish to do so.

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES
