Course Description:
Although the philosophy of language has its roots in the work of Frege in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it did not emerge as a distinct field of study until the 1950's and 1960's. Like most young disciplines, it is suffering an identity crisis. There is heated debate over what the proper topics of study ought to be and over what an adequate account of meaning, truth, reference, etc. should consist in. As a result of this unsettled state of the field, today is a particularly exciting time to explore issues in the philosophy of language, and this is also an excellent way to get involved with fundamental questions about meaning, knowledge, truth, concepts, objectivity, rationality, logic, values, communication, and understanding.

In this course I do not intend to focus on contemporary debates about meaning, truth, and reference that evolved from Frege. I call this the "objectivist" tradition, and I will begin by trying to set out its fundamental assumptions and describing its program. We will focus on several recent criticisms of these fundamental assumptions, such as those raised earlier by speech-act theory and more recently by research coming from the cognitive sciences. These criticisms challenge objectivist theories of meaning and underscore the need for a radically different approach to language, meaning, and concepts.

This opens up what will become our primary focus, namely, an exploration of new research that reveals two fundamental aspects of human understanding and language. First, we will look at studies that show the pivotal role of our bodies in shaping our concepts and patterns of thought. Second, we will explore the ways this embodied understanding is extended via structures of imagination to define our abstract concepts. This second part of the course will emphasize the importance of conceptual metaphor in all of our abstract concepts, including time, causation, mind, self-identity, and morality. In short, our central focus will be on the embodied and imaginative nature of meaning, language, and all forms of symbolic expression. In the second half of the course we will take a very brief look at some of the new neural accounts of selected aspects of conceptualization and language processing.

Schedule of Topics/Readings:
Below is a tentative schedule of topics and readings for the appropriate dates. We may need to make some changes as we assess our progress and interests, so minor revision of this plan may occur. The readings are available at The Copy Shop on 13th. The readings in the packet are in the order listed in the schedule of readings below.

Week I
Jan. 10 Introduction, Survey of approaches to philosophy of language
Jan. 12 Objectivism: Frege
G. Frege, “On Sense and Reference”
R. Stainton, “Mediated Reference” (handout)

Week II
Jan. 17 Referential, Ideational, and Use Theories of Meaning
W. Lycan, Philosophy of Language (1-8, 76-99)
Speech Act Theory:
J. Austin, “Performative Utterances”
Jan. 19
J. Searle, “What is a Speech Act?”

Week III
Jan. 24
J. Searle, “Indirect Speech Acts”
Jan. 26
Category Structure
Lakoff, “Importance of Categorization” (L, 5-11)
Lakoff, “From Wittgenstein to Rosch” (L, 12-57): Basic-level categories and Prototypes [e.g., Cup]
[First essay due]

Week IV
Jan. 31
G. Lakoff, “Idealized Cognitive Models” (L, 68-90): [e.g., mother]
Radial Categories: [e.g., Bed] (handout on types of categories)
Feb. 2
Embody Meaning: Spatial Relations Concepts and Image Schemas
Lakoff and Johnson, “The Cognitive Unconscious” (Ch. 2, pp. 9-15);
“The Embodied Mind” (Ch. 3, pp. 16-44)

Week V
Feb. 7
Spatial Relations and Action Concepts:
L. Barsalou, “Perceptual Symbol Systems” (577-609)
[Second essay due]
Feb. 9
Image Schemas: Bodily structures of meaning
M. Johnson, “The Emergence of Meaning Through Schematic Structure”
(Johnson, Ch. 2, 18-40)

Week VI
Feb. 14
Neural Models of Schemas, Frames, and Actions
J. Feldman. From Molecule to Metaphor (134-182)
Feb. 16
E. Dodge and G. Lakoff, “Image Schemas: From Linguistic Analysis to Neural Grounding” (57-91)

Week VII
Feb. 21
Metaphor (The Traditional View)
M. Johnson, “Introduction: Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition”
J. Searle, “Metaphor”
Introduction to Conceptual Metaphor [e.g., LOVE IS A JOURNEY]
Feb. 23
Metaphor: Primary Metaphor
Lakoff and Johnson, “Primary Metaphor” (L&J, Ch. 4)
Conceptual Metaphor [e.g., metaphors for time]

Week VIII
Feb. 28
Lakoff & Johnson, “The Anatomy of Complex Metaphor” (L & J, Ch. 5)
M. Johnson, “Metaphorical Projections of Image Schemata” (J, Ch. 4)
[e.g., metaphors for mind]
Assignments and Grades:
Grades will be based on two short essays, one seminar presentation, and a term paper. The two short essays and the seminar presentation will each count 20% and the term paper will count 40% of your grade. The two short essays (maximum of 5 double-spaced typewritten pages) will be analyses of speech acts, concepts, and expressions, on topics assigned by the instructor. Papers must be turned in on time to receive full credit. The term paper (of approximately 10-15 pages in length) is on a topic selected by the student but approved by the instructor. The term paper is due no later than Tuesday of finals week, before 5:00 p.m. In the seminar presentation you will be responsible for the first hour of the class, during which you should select key ideas from the reading to present to the seminar participants, developing and illustrating those ideas and raising any concerns or criticisms you might have. Your presentation should NOT be a summarizing of the reading.

Plagiarism/Cheating:
The essays you write for this course must be your own work. Plagiarism, cheating, and various forms of academic dishonesty are defined on the University of Oregon website under Academic Dishonesty. Any incident of academic dishonesty may result in severe penalties, as specified by UO guidelines.