PHIL 443
Feminist philosophy of language

Spring 2012
10.00 – 11:50 Monday & Wednesday

Instructor: Professor Beata Stawarska
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Description

The field of feminist philosophy of language is as diverse and varied as feminism and philosophy of language regarded on their own are. In this course, our thematic focus is going to be on contemporary philosophical writings which not only diagnose the myriad ways in which gender bias is written into our language, but also explore concrete possibility of emancipation in and through our linguistic practices and experiences. We will open with representative essays by the linguist Robin Lakoff on Language and Woman’s Place, which introduced the problem of gender bias to linguistic study. We will then turn to scholarship on gender formation and representation within language considered as a communicative or speech act, notably as developed by Jennifer Hornsby & Rae Langton, who bring J. L. Austin’s classic speech act theory to bear on a set of feminist concerns, like equal expression and the threat of being silenced. We will engage this analysis with classic studies of the pernicious effects of sexist and hate speech by the legal theorists Catherine MacKinnon in Only Words, and Richard Delgado in Words that Wound. This research will then be challenged by the contemporary feminist philosopher Judith Butler’s Excitable Speech, which cautions against using state censorship to control sexist and racist language, and calls for a different practice of re-claiming and re-signifying injurious words.

Course requirements:
ATTENDANCE: This is a small seminar style class, and you are expected to attend all the meetings and participate actively in the conversation. One unexcused absence is allowed per term.

READING. This course has a sizable reading load, and you will be required to read the assigned texts carefully, and be prepared to discuss them in class. In addition to attending the class, you will need to plan your schedule to allow sufficient time for the required reading ahead of class.

WRITING. Each Wednesday (excluding week 1 and 10) you will submit a one to two pages typed up response to the readings assigned for the week. The response is not expected to be a polished piece of writing (but needs to be readable and free from spelling/grammatical errors); it provides an opportunity for you to actively engage the material, and raise specific questions to the reading.

COLLABORATION. You will give one collaborative in-class presentation on gender representations in the language of popular media. Examples of media can include a popular TV series, TV or radio talk shows, media reports, blogs….You will be asked to focus especially on women’s and men’s language, and/or language about women and men. Guidelines will be distributed separately.
You will then write up a short (3-5 pages) collaborative research paper developing the ideas and incorporating feedback to the in-class presentation.

There will be one term paper. The term paper is 8-12 pages long. Topics and guidelines for both papers will be provided in advance; in some cases, the students may write the final on a topic of their own choice (approved in advance by the instructor).

All written assignments should be typewritten, double-spaced, font size no smaller than 11. They need to include the class title, your name - and my name for the midterm and final papers.

**Grade components:**
- Participation: 10%
- Weekly response to the reading: 10%
- Collaborative in-class presentation: 15%
- Collaborative research paper: 15%
- Final paper: 50%

Total: 100%

**Grading**
What kind of paper deserves an “A,” “B,” etc.? The following rubric reflects the general standards of the Philosophy Department at the University of Oregon.

- **A** = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.
- **B** = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.
- **C** = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
- **D** = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
- **F** = failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

Please note: what counts as “excellent” or “OK,” for example, depends in part upon the nature and level of the class in question.

**Late paper policy:** the overall grade for the paper will be reduced by 0.3 grade if no extension has been granted by the instructor before the paper is due.

**Plagiarism:** a failure to cite your sources and give credit to others for their work is a violation of academic honesty, and can result in an F grade for the class.

**Rules of thumb for citing:**
- Accurately quote the original author’s words.
- Enclose the quotation within quotation marks.
- Follow the quotation with an in-text citation (author's name, title, page no.)
- Introduce the quotation with a phrase that includes the author's name (e.g., Descartes argues that...)
- Provide a full bibliography with a list of cited works at the end of the paper.

**....and paraphrasing:**
- Paraphrasing or summarizing doesn't mean just changing a couple of words from the original work.
• Acknowledge the source through in-text citations immediately following the paraphrase.

You can find more information about how to cite and paraphrase in an academic paper at: http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/

Final Paper due at noon on Wednesday, June 13. Please submit the paper electronically as a Word document to stawarsk@uoregon.edu

Required Texts:
Available at Black Sun Bookstore, 2467 Hilyard (next to Allan Bros Café):
Robin Lakoff, Language and Woman’s Place (Oxford 2004)
Catharine MacKinnon Only Words (Harvard 1993)
Judith Butler Excitable Speech (Routledge)

There is also a selection of readings available on Blackboard (Bb).

Meeting Schedule:

WEEK 1 (April 2-8)
• Monday: Introductory Meeting.
What is ‘Feminist Philosophy of Language’, and why do we need it? Learning expectations in this course.

I. Diagnosing gender bias in language – a classic study:
• Wednesday Reading: Robin Lakoff, Language and Woman’s Place. Author’s Introduction, pp. 15-28; Part I: Language and Woman’s Place, 1. Introduction, and 2. Talking like a Lady, pp. 39-51.

WEEK 2 (April 9-15)
• Monday: Lakoff, Part I: Language and Woman’s Place, Language and Woman’s Place, 3. Talking about Women, pp. 51-75.
• Wednesday: Lakoff, P. II Why Women Are Ladies, pp. 77-102.

WEEK 3 (April 16-22)
II. Contemporary responses to the classic study

• Monday: What Does a Focus on ‘Men’s Language’ Tell Us about Language and Woman’s Place? pp. 229- 235; ‘Strong Language’ in a Professional Woman’s Talk, pp. 237-243; ‘I am a Woman, Hear me Roar’ – The Importance of Linguistic Stereotype for Lesbian Identity Performances, by Robin Queen pp. 289- 294; R. Barrett: As Much as we Use Language – Lakoff's Queer Augury, pp. 296-301 (all readings in Language and Woman’s Place)

III. Feminist speech act theory: language in the social world

**WEEK 4 (April 23-29)**


**WEEK 5 (April 30-May 6)**

• **Monday:** In-class presentations of collaborative projects on gender representations in the language of popular media.

**III. Free speech and/or injurious speech – the right to equal protection**

• Wednesday: Catherine McKinnon *Only Words*, Ch. I, Defamation and Discrimination, pp. 1-41.

**WEEK 6 (May 7-13)**


• Wednesday: Catherine McKinnon *Only Words*, Ch. III, Equality and Speech, pp. 69 – 110.

**WEEK 7 (May 14-20)**

• Monday: Catherine McKinnon *Only Words*, Ch. III, Equality and Speech, pp. 69 – 110 (contd). Guest Lecture TBA.


**WEEK 8 (May 21-27)**

**IV. Injurious speech reconsidered – censoring and/or reclaiming linguistic meaning**

• Monday: Butler *Excitable Speech*. Introduction: On Linguistic Vulnerability, pp. 1-41


**WEEK 9 (May 28 – June 3)**

• Monday: Memorial Day Holiday – no class.

• Wednesday: Butler *Excitable Speech*. Ch. 2: Sovereign Performatives, pp. 71-102.
WEEK 10 (June 4 - 10)

- Wednesday: Presentations of final paper projects/concluding remarks.

The reading schedule is subject to change. All the changes will be announced in advance in class and online.