PHIL 158 / Fall 2026
PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Dr. Bo Mou
(bo.mou@sjsu.edu)

Wednesday 3:00pm-5:45pm / Sweeney Hall 345

Philosophy of language is philosophical investigation into language in view of its relation to reality/objects, thought, and logic. It has been considered as one of the core areas of philosophy especially in the setting of contemporary development of philosophy. Its significance and value include (but not limited to) these connections. (1) It has its intrinsic value for philosophical and other intellectual thinking as it provides powerful conceptual and explanatory resources needed for in-depth philosophical exploration. (2) It explores a range of issues that have extensive significance, such as: What is the relationship between language, thought, and the world? What is meaning? How is language communication possible? (3) It is closely related to some other important areas in philosophy (such as metaphysics, philosophy of mind, logic/philosophy of logic, epistemology…) and some other disciplines and topics (such as linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, AI LLMs, …)._

The course as given in Fall 2026 is an "advanced" introduction to the philosophy of language on a range of issues concerning the relationship between language, reality and thought, especially the issues of reference and of predication. The course emphasizes <1> how distinct seemingly competing approaches can talk to and engage with each other and make joint contributions, <2> how modern scholarship and relevant resources from different traditions using distinct types of language can jointly enhance our understanding and treatment, and <3> how this exploration has its across-the-board significance to a range of fundamental concerns in philosophy.

Texts:
<1> _Course Reader_ (including classical and seminal resources on the issues under examination);
<2> M. Morris: _An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language_ (Cambridge University Press, 2007);
<3> H. Cappelen & J. Dever: _Puzzles of Reference_ (Oxford University Press, 2018).
<4> Supplementary/background readings (from the instructor's monograph _Cross-Tradition Engagement on the Laws of Logic: Approaching Identity and Reference from Classical Chinese Philosophy to Modern Logic_ (Routledge 2024) and edited anthology _Philosophy of Language, Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy_ (Brill 2018), etc.

For philosophy majors who plan to enter Ph.D. programs in philosophy, this course will prepare you in this core area. For those who plan to enter law schools, it will enhance your capacities of conceptual, linguistic, and logical analyses. For others, it will help you have due understanding of the across-the-board fundamental relationship between language, world, and thought and enhance your treatment of its related issues in your interested areas.