PHIL 3710/LING 3332: Philosophy of Language
Week 0: Introduction

1. We will be thinking about language and how we use it. Here are some interesting questions that we will not be considering:

- What is a language?
- Why do some systems of symbol usage constitute a language whereas others do not?
- When do we have two languages rather than two dialects of a single language?
- What is a word?
- Why do some strings of letters count as words whereas others do not?
- When do we have two words rather than two spellings of a single word?

2. We will mostly be concerned with questions that have to do with *meaning*:

- What is meaning?
- What is it for an expression (e.g. word, sentence) to have meaning (i.e. be meaningful)?
- Why do some expressions ('brilliant') have meaning whereas others ('zukable') do not?
- What is it for a speaker to mean something?
- Which is more fundamental: a speaker meaning something, or an expression meaning something, or neither?
- Are there such things as meanings?
- What is the meaning of a name?
- What is the meaning of 'and'? How about 'but'?
- What is the meaning of 'the'? How about 'the dog'?
- Why is there an ambiguity in 'Mary is a good dancer'?

3. Some background:

a. Some expressions are clearly meaningless ('gwtrfg'), some are clearly meaningful ('John is tall'), some are not clearly either ('John be tall', 'Mary misbelted herself', 'John Mary loves')
b. Among the meaningful expressions, some have structure ('Mary wants a very big dog', 'disambiguated'), and some do not ('dog')
c. We can represent the structure of 'Mary wants a big dog and John hates cats' as follows:
    i. [[Mary [wants [a [big dog]]]] and [John [hates cats]]]
    ii. [[Mary$_N$ [wants$_V$ [a$_D$ [big$_A$ dog$_N$]$_{NP}$]$_{DP}$]$_{VP}$]$_S$ and$_C$ [John$_N$ [hates$_V$ cats$_N$]$_{VP}$]$_S$]$_S$
d. There are reasons to think that the meaning of a structured expression is determined by the meanings of its constituents and the manner in which they are combined
e. There is such a thing as *lexical ambiguity*: 'bank'
f. There is such a thing as *structural ambiguity*: 'Everyone is not yet here', 'John married Mary'