SEUNGTAEK LEE

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RESEARCH

Areas of Specialization: Philosophy of Language, Social Philosophy
Areas of Competence: Philosophy of Mind, Cognitive Science, Logic, Metaphysics

EDUCATION

University of California, Los Angeles 2020–2027 (expected)
Ph.D. Candidate in Philosophy
Dissertation: *Agency in Language Use*
Committee: Sam Cumming (co-chair), Josh Armstrong (co-chair),
Gabriel Greenberg, Pamela Hieronymi, Jessica Keiser (external)

Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea 2015–2017
M.A. in Philosophy
Thesis: *Property Realism and the Problem of Constituting Individuals*
Advisor: Hwan Sunwoo

Sogang University, Seoul, Korea 2010–2015
B.A. in Economics, *cum laude*
Joint Major in Politics, Economics, and Philosophy (PEP)

PUBLICATIONS

Journal Articles

"Referring without a Single Target"
The Philosophical Quarterly (forthcoming).

"Complex Names"
Synthese 206, 19 (2025).

"Cancelled Predication and Target-Shifting" (in Korean)
Korean Journal of Logic 22 (2019).

Selected Translations (English to Korean; * indicates co-translated)
Grice, H. P. "Logic and Conversation."
Searle, J. "Indirect Speech Acts."
Abell, C. "Art: What It Is and Why It Matters."
Ney, A., & Hazlett, A. "The Metaphysics of Race."

*Kukla, Q. "Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice."
Korta, K., & Perry, J. "Pragmatics."
Michaelson, E., & Reimer, M. "Reference."
*McGinn, C. *Philosophy of Language: The Classics Explained*.
Cappelen, H., & Dever, J. *Context and Communication*.

Works in Progress

Paper on linguistic diversity as conventional
Paper on AI systems as language users

Presentations (* indicates refereed)

"Partial Intentions for AI?"
Yonsei Psychology & Philosophy of AI Research Seminar (PsyPhAI). Aug 2026

"Conventionalism and Language Change"
UCLA Ethics Workshop. Apr 2026
*APA Pacific Division. Symposium. Online. Apr 2026
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln Philosophy Graduate Conference. Mar 2026
*University of Massachusetts Amherst Philosophy Graduate Conference. Nov 2025
*University of Utah Philosophy Graduate Conference. Nov 2025
Paper accepted, but could not attend
UCLA Mind & Language Workshop. Oct 2025
UCLA Ethics Workshop. Apr 2025
UCLA Mind & Language Workshop. Nov 2024

"Partial Intentionalism about Demonstratives"
*APA Pacific Division. Colloquium. San Francisco. Apr 2025

"Varieties of Referential Intentions"
*APA Central Division. Colloquium. Online. Feb 2025
*Syracuse Philosophy Graduate Conference. Mar 2024
UCLA Mind & Language Workshop. Dec 2023

"Complex Names"
UCLA Proposition Talk Series. Feb 2023
*North American Summer School of Language, Logic, and Information (NASSLLI) Student Session. University of Southern California (USC). Jun 2022
Korean Society of Analytic Philosophy (KSAP) Graduate Division. Online. Aug 2021

"Cancelled Predication and Target-Shifting"
KSAP Graduate Division. Seoul National University. Mar 2019

"Property Realism and the Problem of Constituting Individuals"
KSAP Graduate Division. Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Mar 2017

Comments

Tillman, C. & Spencer, J. "Ontology (of Art) Without Abstracta (or Concreta)"
APA Central Division. Colloquium. Chicago. Feb 2026

Prizes & Awards

Logic & Language Prize. UCLA Philosophy Department. 2024
Awarded annually to one graduate student for the best essay on logic and language
Logic & Language Prize. UCLA Philosophy Department. 2022
Awarded annually to one graduate student for the best essay on logic and language
Best Student Paper. NASSLLI Student Session Committee. 2022
Awarded to two graduate students for the best presentations
Distinguished Master's Thesis Award. Yonsei University. 2017
Competitive university award for the best MA's theses

Fellowships & Grants

Dissertation Year Fellowship. UCLA Philosophy Department. 2026–2027
Graduate Student Travel Stipend. APA Pacific Division. 2026
Graduate Student Travel Stipend. APA Pacific Division. 2025
Graduate Student Travel Stipend. APA Central Division. 2025
Edwin W. Pauley Fellowship. UCLA Graduate Division. 2023–2024
Graduate Summer Research Mentorship. UCLA Graduate Division. 2022
Summer Mentored Research Fellowship. UCLA Philosophy Department. 2021
First Year Fellowship. UCLA Philosophy Department. 2020–2021
National Research Fellowship. National Research Foundation of Korea. 2016
Brain Korea 21 Plus Fellowship. The Korean Ministry of Education. 2016
Albatross Scholarship. Sogang University. 2013
Honors Scholarship. Sogang University. 2013
Xavier Scholarship. Sogang University. 2011

Teaching Experience

UCLA, Primary Instructor

Introduction to Philosophy of Mind (Online)	Summer 2026
Symbolic Logic I	Summer 2025

UCLA, Teaching Assistant

Symbolic Logic I (Steven Levy)	Spring 2026
Meaning and Communication (Sam Cumming)	Winter 2026
Introduction to Philosophy of Mind (Gabriel Greenberg)	Fall 2025
Introduction to Ethical Theory (Sare Ghorbani Khaledi)	Summer 2025
Philosophy of Medicine (Sherrilyn Roush)	Spring 2025
Symbolic Logic I (Sherrilyn Roush)	Winter 2025
Introduction to Philosophy of Mind (Grace Helton)	Fall 2024
Historical Introduction to Philosophy (Brian Copenhaver)	Summer 2024
Introduction to Philosophy of Mind (Torsten Odland)	Summer 2023
Language and Communication (Josh Armstrong)	Spring 2023
Symbolic Logic I (Steven Levy)	Winter 2023
History of Greek Philosophy (Adam Crager)	Fall 2022
Introduction to Philosophy of Science (Katrina Elliott)	Spring 2022
Introduction to Philosophy of Mind (Gloria Andrada)	Winter 2022
Introduction to Contemporary Moral Issues (Janelle DeWitt)	Fall 2021

Yonsei University, Teaching Assistant

Philosophical Logic (Hwan Sunwoo)	Spring 2016
Epistemology (Hwan Sunwoo)	Fall 2015

Professional & Departmental Service

Reviewer for Journals: *Philosophical Studies*.
Reviewer for Korean Journals: *Chulhak-Sasang, Nonri-Yeongu*.

Conference Reviewer. USC–UCLA Philosophy Graduate Conference.	2021–2026
Graduate Student Co-organizer. SLIME Workshop. UCLA.	2022
Conference Reviewer. Seoul Philosophy Graduate Conference.	2017
Research Assistant. Relativism in Semantics and Epistemology. Yonsei University.	2016
Office Assistant. Yonsei University.	2015–2016
Student Representative. Sogang University.	2012–2013

Graduate Coursework (* indicates audit)

Philosophy of Language and Logic

*Social Meaning (Sam Cumming, Winter 2025)
*Sociality and Meaning (Josh Armstrong, Fall 2024)
*Generics (Sam Cumming, Fall 2023)
Modals (Sam Cumming, Spring 2023)
Language as Skill (Josh Armstrong & Carlotta Pavese, Winter 2023)
Frege (Sam Cumming, Fall 2022)
*Reference (Sam Cumming, Fall 2021)
Metalogic (Sean Walsh, Winter 2021)
Holism and Language Change (Josh Armstrong, Fall 2020)
First Year Seminar: Language (David Kaplan, Fall 2020)
Propositional Attitudes (Hwan Sunwoo, Fall 2015)
Kripke (Hwan Sunwoo, Spring 2015)

Linguistics

Semantics III (Jessica Rett, Spring 2022)
Semantics II (Yael Sharvit, Winter 2022)
Semantics I (Dylan Bumford, Fall 2021)

Philosophy of Mind and Action

*Mental Iconicity (Gabriel Greenberg, Winter 2026)
*Virtue and Skill Epistemology (Carlotta Pavese, Fall 2023)
Emotions and Their Expression (Gabriel Greenberg, Winter 2022)
First Year Seminar: Mind & Epistemology (Andrew Hsu, Spring 2021)
Causation and Mental Causation (Chiwook Won, Spring 2016)
Action and Agency (Sunhyung Rhee, Fall 2015)

Metaphysics and Philosophy of Science

Truth (Sean Walsh, Spring 2021)
Lewis's Metaphysics of Science (Katrina Elliott, Winter 2021)
*Creationism about Fictional Characters (Jeonggyu Lee, Spring 2020)
*Causation (Hwan Sunwoo, Spring 2017)
Properties: Universals and Tropes (Hwan Sunwoo, Fall 2016)
Properties: Realism vs. Nominalism (Hwan Sunwoo, Spring 2016)

History of Philosophy

Aristotle's Metaphysics (Adam Crager, Spring 2022)
Aristotle's Logic (Adam Crager, Spring 2021)
Aquina on Personal Identity (Jaekyung Lee, Spring 2016)
Problem of Universals in Medieval Philosophy (Jaekyung Lee, Fall 2015)
Buddhism and Heidegger (Seungchong Lee, Spring 2015)

Ethics and Value Theory

*Sports as Legal Systems (Mark Greenberg, Spring 2026)
*Legal Interpretation (Mark Greenberg, Winter 2026)
*Legal Philosophy (Amin Ebrahimi Afrouzi, Fall 2025)
Ethics Workshop (Pamela Hieronymi, 2024–26)
Labor and Its Liberation from Capital (A. J. Julius, Winter 2022)
First Year Seminar: Moral Philosophy (Barbara Herman, Winter 2021)
Moral Responsibility and Free Will (Pamela Hieronymi, Fall 2020)
Kantian Ethics (Hyungchul Kim, Spring 2015)

References

Sam Cumming (co-chair)
Professor
UCLA
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Josh Armstrong (co-chair)
Associate Professor
UCLA
jarmstrong@humnet.ucla.edu

Pamela Hieronymi
Professor
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Jessica Keiser (external)
Associate Professor
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jkeiser@unc.edu

Sherrilyn Roush (teaching)
Professor
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roush@ucla.edu

Dissertation Abstract

We talk to people, not to the air. Some are friends, some are strangers, and some are those we want to be friends with. Depending on whom we are speaking to, we expect different things and choose different words. A childhood friend calls me "Taek," a department member calls me "Seungtaek," and a public officer calls me "Mr. Lee." All of these linguistic items refer to the same individual, and yet they do different social work. Each establishes and maintains familiarity, equality, and formality. This simple observation reminds us of an important fact about language: it is more than a vehicle for exchanging information; it is a tool for coordinating our social lives.

The standard approach in philosophy of language, however, has largely overlooked the role of language in shaping and sustaining relationships between individuals. Instead, it has conceived of language as a ready-made neutral tool for rational agents to share information by expressing their thoughts. As a result, different ways of saying the same thing or referring to the same individual have received relatively little attention and are often thought to be theoretical noises that tell us nothing interesting about the nature of language. I am deeply concerned about this idealization. I believe that subtle differences that make speakers choose different words and design utterances relative to particular

listeners reveal important insight into the multi-layered nature of linguistic convention and communication.

My dissertation consists of three stand-alone chapters that defend and articulate the social character of language and language use from different angles. Each chapter identifies and challenges an implicit assumption underlying a traditional topic in the philosophy of language by drawing on insights from semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics.

In the **first chapter**, "Complex Names," I challenge the orthodox view that the linguistic function of proper names is exhausted by their referential role. I focus on a class of names that has long remained at the margins of theoretical discussion, such as 'Princess Diana' and 'Captain Cook'. Unlike their simple counterparts, 'Diana' and 'Cook', these expressions do more than bring an individual into the discourse. They enable speakers to take for granted that interlocutors recognize the individual as occupying a social role or status. I argue that this dual profile of complex names is best explained by distinguishing between at-issue and not-at-issue content in these words. and by treating them as structured referential expressions whose descriptive element contributes background information to the common ground. According to this analysis, choosing one form of a name over another is not merely a stylistic choice but a way of positioning an individual within a social landscape. For instance, continuing to refer to an impeached president Smith as 'President Smith' invites interlocutors to accommodate them as occupying the presidential status.

In the **second chapter**, "Referring without a Single Target," I examine demonstrative reference. Even simple expressions such as 'this' and 'that' often serve purposes beyond identifying an object. A teacher who tells a student, "That's a good question," may intentionally leave open what 'that' refers to because encouraging participation matters more than fixing a single referent. I argue that such cases challenge the widespread assumption that successful demonstrative reference requires speakers to determine a unique referential target in advance. Drawing on parallel cases in action theory, I suggest that speakers can remain open to multiple candidate referents while still holding partial control over their use of demonstratives. This is possible because speakers routinely rely on hearers to resolve referential indeterminacy in light of shared expectations and context. Demonstrative reference is thus not simply an exercise of speaker agency but a coordinative activity jointly accomplished by speaker and hearer. I develop a weaker intention-based constraint according to which speakers need only treat the eventual referent as one admissible outcome within a subordinate plan that serves their overarching communicative aim.

In the **third chapter**, "Language Use without Conformity," I extend this coordinative perspective from individual acts of reference to linguistic convention itself. I begin with a puzzle for a familiar picture of David Lewis's theory of linguistic convention: if public language is sustained by our common interest in communication, why do people continue to use different languages, dialects, and linguistic variants, even within the same communities? Drawing on recent work on social meaning, I show that linguistic diversity is not merely pervasive but systematically structured by social roles, groups, and circumstances. I then turn to Lewis's analysis of signaling systems and argue that the apparent tension arises from conflating coordination with conformity. Signaling coordination requires participants' respective communication policies to fit together, not that they speak in the same way. Moreover, these policies can vary with conversational and social roles. Linguistic diversity can therefore be part of, rather than a departure from, linguistic coordination.

Last updated: November 2026