

# Dr. Ethan Nowak (he/they)

Last update on October 30, 2021

[ethan.nowak@umu.se](mailto:ethan.nowak@umu.se) • +46 90 786 75 08 • [www.ethannowak.net](http://www.ethannowak.net)

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## Areas of Specialization

Philosophy of Language • Social Philosophy • Formal Semantics

## Areas of Competence

Philosophy of Race and Gender • Philosophy of Mind • Logic

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## Employment

Umeå University Associate Professor	UMEÅ, SWEDEN 2020–contintuing
King’s College London Leverhulme Early Career Fellow	LONDON, UK 2019 – 2020
Umeå University Research Fellow	UMEÅ, SWEDEN 2019
University College London Teaching Fellow and MA Tutor	LONDON, UK 2016 – 2019

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## Education

University of California, Berkeley PhD in Philosophy Dissertation: <i>Two Dogmas about Demonstratives</i> Supervisors: John MacFarlane and Seth Yalcin	BERKELEY, CA May 2016
University of Oxford BPhil in Philosophy	OXFORD, UK June 2006
Reed College BA in Politics and Philosophy	PORTLAND, OR June 2004

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## Papers

### Published — Single Author

1. [Language extinction](#) (2021). In Khoo, J. and Sterken, R., editors, *The Routledge Handbook of Social and Political Philosophy of Language*.
2. [Language loss and illocutionary silencing](#) (2020). *Mind*.
3. [No context, no content, no problem](#) (2020). *Mind and Language*.
4. [Really complex demonstratives](#) (2020). *Erkenntnis*.
5. [Complex demonstratives, hidden arguments, and presupposition](#) (2019). *Synthese*.
6. [Multiculturalism, autonomy, and language preservation](#) (2019). *Ergo*.
7. [Demonstratives without rigidity or ambiguity](#) (2014). *Linguistics and Philosophy*.

### Published — Co-Authored

8. [Meta-meta-semantics](#) (2021). With Eliot Michaelson. *The Philosophical Quarterly*.
9. [On salience-based theories of demonstratives](#) (2021). With Eliot Michaelson, forthcoming in Archer, S., editor, *Salience: A Philosophical Inquiry*.
10. [Who’s your ideal listener?](#) (2020). With Eliot Michaelson. *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.
11. [Discourse and method: why appeals to context won’t go away](#) (2019). With Eliot Michaelson. *Linguistics and Philosophy*.

### Published — General Audiences

12. [Extinct Languages](#) (2021). *The Philosophers’ Magazine*.

## Books

### Philosophy of Language: The Basics

(Under contract with Routledge.)

The basic aim of *Philosophy of Language: The Basics* is to provide a broad introduction to the philosophy of language for beginning university students or the interested layperson. As I see the philosophy of language, the field can be usefully seen as being organized around two fundamental projects. The first is the project of explaining how we are able to exchange information with one another, simply by producing speech, signs, and so on. The second is the project of explaining how we are able to use words to perform actions, that is, to do things to (and for) one another.

In the first 4 chapters of the book, I focus on the first explanatory project, using classic philosophical work on proper names, definite descriptions, and quantifiers to show how semantic, metasemantic, and pragmatic components fit together to provide a theory of communication. In the second 4 chapters, I survey a number of topics in what we might think of as applied speech act theory, showing how the basic perspective sketched by J.L. Austin throws light on socially significant questions concerning various forms of discursive injustice, slurs and reclamation, and linguistic diversity.

### Speech, Skill, and the Significance of Style

(Partial manuscript under review.)

The central research program in the philosophy of language today descends from Gottlob Frege's late 19th-century attempt to precisely characterize the meanings of mathematical and logical expressions. Although the set of tools Frege developed for that purpose has since been adapted, expanded, and fruitfully applied to an ever-widening range of phenomena involving both formal and natural languages, philosophers have largely retained one of his basic assumptions: that the fundamental aim of our linguistic activity is to exchange information (ordinarily conceived of in terms of propositions that may be either true or false).

While it would be crazy to deny that our ability to tell one another which things are good to eat, where the dangers are, or whether the continuum hypothesis is true deserves the attention it has received, philosophers' focus on information exchange has obscured a point that will be familiar to anyone who remembers what it was like to try and make friends at school: *how* you speak is often as important as *what* you say. The goal of *Speech and the Significance of Style* is to develop a conception of language that does justice to this platitude by placing what we might call language's 'communing' functions on an equal footing with the obviously important communicative functions philosophers have traditionally focused on.

In the first of two parts of the book, I show how existing philosophical approaches overlook a wide range of intuitively meaningful properties of language that sociolinguists have proven to be systematic. I argue that integrating these 'social meanings' with meaning in the sense philosophers have historically been concerned with requires us to move beyond the idea that language is fundamentally a conduit for information, and I develop a view on which speech (signing, etc.) is treated as a medium in which speakers are constantly engaged in the project of constructing a sense of affinity (or antipathy, as the case may be) and social attunement with their interlocutors.

In Part 2, I show how the conception of language I describe in Part 1 opens up space for progress on a variety of questions of both broad and deep social and political interest. A proper understanding of the significance and pervasiveness of social meanings will allow us to find new sources of value in linguistic and dialectical diversity, to recognize new considerations that ought to figure in discussions about the freedom of expression, and to appreciate new promises and challenges posed by the development of artificial systems that produce and interpret natural language.

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## Recent Presentations (\* refereed, † invited)

*Emerging dialects and linguistic representation*

† Research presentation

† Linguistic Justice Conference

University of Reading / February 2022

KU Leuven / September 2021

<i>Into the pluriverse</i> (w/Eliot Michaelson)	
† Research presentation	University of Vienna / January 2022
† Language Working Group	University of Warsaw / June 2021
<i>Speech, skill, and the significance of style</i>	
† Jowett Society	University of Oxford / May 2021
† Research presentation	University of Pittsburg / March 2021
† Research presentation	Uppsala University / February 2021
† Research presentation	University of Glasgow / October 2019
† Research presentation	University of Manchester / August 2019
† Language, Cognition, and Context Conf.	Córdoba, Argentina / August 2019
* Swedish Congress of Philosophy	Umeå University / June 2019
† Berkeley-London Grad. Conf. (keynote)	UC Berkeley / May 2019
<i>Poetic Injustice</i>	
† Research presentation	University of Leeds / March 2021
† Language Beyond Truth Conditions Workshop	Umeå University / December 2019
<i>Climate change and the loss of history</i>	
† Research seminar in philosophy	Umeå University / December 2020
<i>Meta-metaseantics</i>	
† Linguistics and Philosophy Colloquium	University of California, San Diego / November 2020
<i>Definite descriptions are always referential</i>	
† Institute of Philosophy	University of London / January 2020
<i>Humor, personal style, and self-cultivation</i>	
* British Society for Aesthetics Synergy Conference	University of Kent / October 2019
<i>Skill, recognition, and respect: new work on how speech matters</i>	
† Research seminar in philosophy	Umeå University, Sweden / April 2019
<i>'Can <math>\phi</math> easily' can easily mean 'can easily <math>\phi</math>'</i>	
† New Work in the Philosophy of Language	All Souls, Oxford / May 2019
<i>Language loss and illocutionary silencing</i>	
* Eastern Division Meeting of the APA	Savannah, GA / January 2018
† UCL / Oxford Semantics and Pragmatics Workshop	UCL Linguistics / November 2017
<i>Comments on U. Stojnic 'Context and the grammar of prominence'</i>	
† Context and Variables Conference	All Souls, Oxford / April 2017
<i>No context, no content, no problem</i>	
† Workshop on Contextual Indefiniteness	Institut d'Études Avancées, Paris / April 2017
<i>Mad-dog variability</i>	
* Pacific Division Meeting of the APA	Seattle, WA / April 2017
† National Research University	Moscow, Russia / September 2016
<i>Hidden arguments and selection presuppositions</i>	
† Pragmatics Workshop	UCL Linguistics / October 2016
* Definiteness Across Languages	UNAM/Colmex, México D.F. / June 2016
<i>Demonstratives are free variables</i>	
* APA Pacific Division Meeting	San Francisco, CA / March 2016

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## Grants, Fellowships, and Awards

## King's College London

Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship / GBP £374,000 (FEC) 2019-2022

## University College London

Nominated for Students' Choice Award as Outstanding Personal Tutor 2019  
Nominated for Students' Choice Award as Outstanding Personal Tutor 2018  
Nominated for Students' Choice Outstanding Teaching Award 2017

## UC Berkeley

APA Pacific Division Graduate Student Stipend / US \$300 2016  
APA Eastern Division Graduate Student Stipend / US \$300 2014  
US Dept. of Education Summer Fellowship (FLAS) / US \$5,000 (Moscow, Russia) 2014  
US Dept. of Education Academic Year Fellowship (FLAS) / US \$45,000 2013-14  
Graduate Division Summer Research Grant / US \$3,500 2013  
Graduate Division Travel Grant / US \$1,000 2013  
Fulbright US Student Research Grant / US \$48,000 (Moscow, Russia) 2011-12  
Philosophy Department Summer Research Grant / US \$3,500 2012  
Philosophy Department Travel Grant / US \$800 2012  
Dean's Fellowship / US \$37,000 2010-11  
US Dept. of Education Summer Fellowship (FLAS) / US \$5,500 (Saint Petersburg, Russia) 2009  
Ralph W. Church Fellowship / US \$64,200 2006-07

## University of Oxford

Philosophy Faculty Graduate Scholarship / GBP £17,540 (full fees and maintenance) 2004-06  
Clarendon Bursary / GBP £17,540 (duplicated full fees and maintenance) 2004-06  
Christ Church American Friends' Scholarship / GBP £5,000 (duplicated fee payment) 2004-05

## Reed College

Phi Beta Kappa 2004  
Rhodes Scholarship Trust, US Finalist (District VII) 2003  
3 Commendations for Academic Excellence 2001-04

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## Teaching Experience

### Undergraduate Courses

Formal Semantics Umeå, Q4 2021  
Logic Umeå, Q3 2021  
Mind and Language Umeå, Q3 2021  
Philosophy of Perception Umeå, Q2 2021  
Metaphysics Umeå, Q1 2021  
Epistemology Umeå, Q4 2020  
Philosophy of Race KCL, Spring 2020  
Philosophy of Mind UCL, Spring 2019  
Philosophy of Language UCL, Fall 2018, 2017  
Logic 2 UCL, Spring 2018, 2017  
Logic 1 UCL, Fall 2017, 2016

### Graduate Courses

MA Proseminar in Value Theory UCL, Spring 2019  
MA Proseminar in Theoretical Philosophy UCL, Fall 2018  
Advanced Topics: Linguistic Semantics and the Philosophy of Language UCL, Spring 2018, 2017  
MPhil Seminar on Strawson's *Individuals* UCL, Fall 2016

### Supervision

Primary supervisor for Luise Mirow on *Expressive Lies* Umeå, Fall 2020 –  
Supervisor for 4 MA dissertations (2 phil. of mind, 1 phil. of race, 1 semantics) Umeå, 2020-2021  
Supervisor for 6 MA dissertations (2 phil. of mind, 2 phil. of language, 1 AI, 1 feminism) UCL, 2018-2019

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## Pedagogical Courses

### Umeå University

## Research Supervision in Theory and Practice

May–August 2021

Completed term-length course for dissertation supervisors on best practices in research supervision, involving a range of readings and writing assignments based on contemporary empirical work in pedagogy, together with work placement type ‘shadowing’ sessions and interviews with senior university staff responsible for the development and implementation of university-wide initiatives involve equal opportunity, personnel development, improving research student outcomes, and similar.

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## Service

### Administrative Responsibility

*Linguistic Justice Society, Principal / 2021 onwards*

Together with Matteo Bonotti (Monash), Filippo Contesi (Barcelona), and Seunghyun Song (KU Leuven), I organize the Linguistic Justice Society Seminar Series, organize ad hoc interdisciplinary events relating to linguistic justice, and from 2022, will oversee planning for a worldwide annual conference.

*Umeå University, Representative for Equal Gender Opportunities / 2021 onwards*

Participate as a representative for the Department of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies in faculty and university-wide activities relating to gender equality, liaise with administration and student representatives, participate in committee meetings, and organize training activities for staff relating to Swedish laws regarding employment conditions, harassment and similar. Have begun an initiative in the Faculty of the Humanities to move to implement blind initial review of CVs and research proposals for post-doctoral fellowships and tenure-track positions.

*University College London, MA Tutor / 2018-2019*

Administrative and pastoral responsibility for MA program, including generation of reports for university central administration, admissions decisions, exam board organization and chairing, allocation of supervisors and markers, etc.

### Conference Organization

What do we mean by free speech? Umeå University	March 2022
Beyond Truth Conditions, Umeå University	December 2019
6th annual California Universities Semantics and Pragmatics Conference	October 2013

### Refereeing

Referee for: *Australasian Journal of Philosophy, Ergo, Erkenntnis, Glossa, Journal of Philosophical Logic, Linguistics and Philosophy, Mind, Mind and Language, Noûs, Philosopher's Imprint, Philosophy, Philosophical Studies, and Synthese.*

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## Languages

- English: native speaker
- Spanish: fluent
- Russian: fluent
- Swedish: B2 (currently teaching university courses)
- French: B2
- Korean: B1
- Italian: A2
- Cornish: A1