Assumptions within the Philosophy of Language* roughly in order from most to least common today (by my estimate)

Systematicity: Understanding a language is systematic, in the sense that if you understand the expression 'John loves Mary,' you will also understand 'Mary loves John.' What explains this is the compositionality of language (see below).

Productivity: Your understanding of a language is productive, in the sense that you can immediately use new expressions of your language, never seen before in the history of the world. E.g., 'The penguin is standing on top of the vacuum cleaner in Major Williams 224 on August 23, 2010'. Compositionality also purports to explain this.

Compositionality: A language is compositional (a) in a syntactic sense: two expressions can appear in succession to compose a longer, new expression—and (b) in a semantic sense: the meaning of a composed expression is determined by the meaning of its atomic parts (except idioms). It is also assumed that a composed expression (in both senses) is composed only according to certain *rules*. (In the syntactic case, this explains why 'John loves Mary' is a composed expression, but 'John Mary loves' is not. In the semantic case, the rules explain, e.g., why 'John loves Mary' means that Mary is the object of John's affection, rather than John being the object of Mary's.)

Commensurability: Translation is possible: Any expression of one language will be strictly synonymous to an expression in any other language, and we can know what these synonyms are. (Though it's possible for one term to be atomic and its translation to be compound). The immediate upshot is that the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis is wrong. (Dissenter: Quine, though for different reasons than Whorf and Sapir.)

Anti-Meinongianism: Meinong was crazy. There are no objects that don't exist. (Dissenters: Meinong, Graham Priest, Ed Zalta, myself, and only about 4 or 5 others.)

Realism: Terms normally denote objects in a mind-independent world. (Dissenters: Kant, Robert Brandom. Possible dissenters: Carnap, the later Wittgenstein, the later Putnam.)

Anti-Skepticism: We can know about the mind-independent objects our terms denote. N.B., Realism does not assume Anti-Skepticism, nor does AS assume R (witness Bishop Berkeley). But among today's philosophers, the two are usually held jointly.

Thought is Prior to Language: Most philosophers hold the "Gricean" view [sic], where speakers have thoughts that they want to express, and language is simply a means to express those thoughts. Thus, thought is ontologically prior to language. (Dissenter: The later Wittgenstein, who thinks our criteria for "thinking" depend on linguistic practices).

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*Quine however rejects *every* assumption where the word 'meaning' or 'denotes' occurs, since his considered view is Semantic Nihilism: There are no such things as meanings. So for brevity's sake, I omit him when I list dissenters—except when his dissent is for reasons independent of his nihilism

The Basic Psycholinguistic Story: Following Chomsky, linguistic processing proceeds as follows. (This describes speaking; the process goes in reverse when understanding others' speech.) The speaker first has a thought which is inputted into a module that outputs a corresponding "deep" structure of the Universal Grammar. This bit of structure is then the input to a second module, which outputs a surface structure having this deep structure. The surface structure, in turn, is then inputted into a phonological module which outputs a sequence of phonemes constituting the utterance:
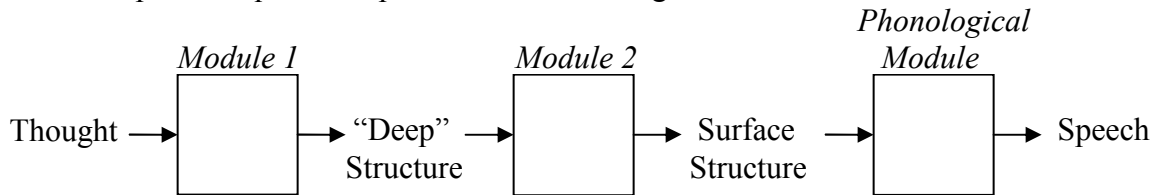
Slight Dissenter: Gilbert Harman—he just skips the first module, arguing that the physical manifestation of a thought *just is* the deep structure. Serious Dissenters: the later Wittgenstein, who resists the priority of thought to language, and behaviorists who reject internal states altogether. Possible Dissenters: Speech-Act Theorists, who at least prefer to focus on sociolinguistic phenomena, rather than an individual's internal states.

Metaphysics is Dubious: Philosophers of language have tended to be antagonistic toward metaphysics. In the first part of the 20th century, many recoiled from the highly abstract and speculative Idealist systems of Hegel and others, and also the sheer obscurity of Heideggerian metaphysics. These seemed to be stylized nonsense that only gave the *illusion* of being meaningful. Views of language were developed to support this. But today, few reject *all* metaphysics. Yet there is suspicion, even re: "analytic" metaphysics, since the issues often look like confusions about linguistic usage, and disputants regularly talk past each other. As before, views about language exist to support these suspicions.

Public and Private Meanings: An expression has a meaning that is determined *by a convention* that is known among speakers; in that sense it is a "public" meaning. But in an individual's idiolect, an expression might be used (either intentionally or not) with a different meaning. Thus, there are "private" meanings as well. (Dissenter: the later Wittgenstein, and many Semantic Externalists)

Russell's "Knowing Which" Principle (famously discussed by Gareth Evans): "To use a term successfully to denote its object, I must *know which* object it denotes." "Knowing which" would also seem sufficient for success with the term. But then, "knowing which" would just re-label this capacity, so the principle would look rather trivial. However, Russell avoided this by reducing "knowing which" to knowing some *descriptor(s)* of the object. Yet in light of Kripke's (1972) *Naming and Necessity*, few philosophers would agree to this today. (But prior to Kripke, the view seemed widely accepted.)

The Linguistic Turn: I can study my "conceptual scheme" by studying my language (vs. introspecting on my concepts *à la* Descartes and Kant). This was common in the early 20th century, but has since been largely abandoned. Yet that does not signal a return to Introspectionism. Instead, many study language as a *social* activity (as in "Post-Analytic" Philosophy); others switched to investigating concepts empirically (as in Cog Sci).