

LNGT 102- Introduction to Sociolinguistics (Spring 2013)

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Office Hours: Mon 3:30-4:30pm; Tues/Thurs 11am-12pm (or by appt)
(LIB 224- next to CTRL)

Class Description

In this course, we will explore the ways that language creates and reflects social identities. We will look at the contextual factors—social, cultural, geographical, political, etc.—that impact language use and variation. In essence, we will learn how language shapes our world, and how we shape language itself.

Key questions we will be exploring in this course include...

1. What are the key features of a linguistic community, and how do communities evolve over time?
2. What distinguishes a language from a dialect, creole, or other variety?
3. How are culture, identity, and power connected to the linguistic choices of groups and individuals?
4. What sorts of methods and questions have been central to sociolinguistic research?
5. What role has language played in public debates about politics, education, social justice, etc.?
6. What questions will be most pertinent to sociolinguistics in coming years?

Required Reading List

1. Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert, and Leap (2009). *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (2nd Ed) John Benjamins.
2. Orwell, G. *1984* (novel).

These two books are available in the Middlebury bookstore. Please purchase them as soon as possible. Other readings and films are available via Moodle ([go/coursehub](#)) or Davis Library Reserve.

Expectations

Academic community is an important aspect of this course; cultivating that community requires the active presence and participation of each member. You are expected to attend all classes on time, prepared to engage actively in course activities and discussion. Late papers, unexcused absences, and missed assignments will be penalized. In the event of illness, please notify me (via email or phone) *before* the class that you will be missing. Multiple absences could have an adverse effect on your final course grade. Several films are assigned as part of course preparation. It is your responsibility to

arrange to watch those films on your own, if you are unable to attend group screenings. Also note that you are expected to attend at least ONE of the Linguistics series lectures this semester, as well as to attend the URO Student Research Symposium in April (see details in calendar).

- Gustavo Friere (Portuguese)
Thursday, February 21, 4:30 pm, RAJ Conference Room
- Jamie Thomas (Dissertation Scholar- Swahili and International and Global Studies)
Tuesday, February 26, 4:30 pm, Hillcrest 103
- Hang Du (Chinese)
Wednesday, March 20, 4:30 pm, Hillcrest 103

Grading Breakdown

- ❖ Participation and Discussion [in-class and online] = 25%
- ❖ Quizzes and Short Assignments = 25%
Quiz dates are on course calendar. Shorter homework assignments may be given from time to time, to accompany and reinforce course readings.
- ❖ Projects (3 total) = 50% . (Due dates on calendar)
 1. Profile of a Linguistic Community = 15% (5% group, 10% individual)
 2. Independent Research Project = 25%
 3. Sociolinguistics Scrapbook = 10%

Although more details on each project will be provided in class, here is a short overview:

Profile of a Linguistic Community (Project 1)

For this project, you and your group members will research the characteristics of a specific linguistic community, focusing on the ways language is used to create/define identity and to build group solidarity. You may draw on a combination of sources for this project, including scholarly publications, general audience resources, popular media, and possibly interviews/surveys with members of this community. The three components for this assignment will be a short oral presentation, a one-page handout of key findings plus a bibliography of sources, and a 2-3 page personal reflection (one from each group member) making connections between your findings and our course material.

Sociolinguistics Scrapbook (Project 2)

This is a project that you will work on throughout the semester, in which you collect and reflect on “artifacts” that are connected to our class. An artifact could be a news article (print or online), media clip, literary text, or live event. Artifacts can be drawn from your other classes as well. For each

artifact, you will write a short (less than one page) reflection that explains why you chose this artifact, and how it relates to sociolinguistics. At least two of your artifacts should be tied to the Spring Student Symposium on Friday April 19th, you are expected to attend. (We'll talk more in class about how to create an artifact from lectures and presentations). Ideally, you will not have to look too hard to find relevant artifacts—I hope that they will begin to “pop out” at you, as you engage with course material and connect it to your daily life.

Independent Research Project (Project 3)

The purpose of this project is to give you the opportunity to engage firsthand in sociolinguistics research. You will develop a narrow and relevant research question that ties in to our course material. To answer your question, you may analyze existing linguistic data (strongly recommended!), such as texts, speech samples, transcripts, or another corpus. Or, you may gather original data using surveys, interviews, or observation/recording.

Your final paper (12-15 pp.) will include an Introduction and Rationale for the project (2-3 pp), a description of Methods (1 p.), a Summary and Discussion of findings (6-8 pp.), and an Annotated Bibliography (single spaced, 2-3pp.) of 8-10 scholarly publications that inform your project (in lieu of a formal literature review). You will complete this project in stages, receiving feedback from your professor and classmates along the way. With the final draft of the paper, you will submit a separate Researcher's Memo (1-2 pp) that describes what you learned from the process, and how it contributed to your learning of Sociolinguistics.

Sample research questions from past students:

1. What are the types and functions of code-switching used by German players in online communities for English language videogames?
2. How many times do Middlebury students use “like” as a filler in a one-minute conversational speech act? How accurate is their estimation of their use of “like”?
3. What contrasting messages about racial identity are evident in the theme songs from 1970s sitcoms starring African Americans?
4. What are the attitudes of Japanese students and professors toward Ryukyuan (endangered) languages in Southern Japan?
5. How has Coca Cola tailored its slogans to reflect cultural and linguistic dynamics in local communities?
6. What are the beliefs and practices of Vermont parents about correcting grammar/pronunciation errors in their children's speech?
7. How does the Simpsons character Cletus both reinforce and resist stereotypes about Appalachian English?
8. How do female students at feel about the greetings “man,” “dude” and “guys”?

9. What strategies do Native Alaskan writers use to integrate indigenous languages into their English novels?

Formatting for Written Work

Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. APA citation style is preferred, but other formats may be accepted upon student request. All work should include an honor code statement.

Communication and Support

Communication and respect are very important to our course. I attempt to return all phone calls and emails within 24 hours, and expect the same of my students. Your feedback is essential to the success of this course. I will give you opportunities to reflect on the course, both in-class and anonymously, but I appreciate hearing from you at any point about your needs and experiences. If you encounter difficulties with any course material or assignments, please contact me early and often, so that I can help support you. I may be able to match you with a peer writing tutor, if you are struggling with written work in this class.

If you have a disability or learning issue of any kind that might impact your studies, please communicate with me and/or the ADA office, so that we can make a plan to accommodate you. See <http://www.middlebury.edu/campuslife/diversity/ada/> for more information.

Intro to Sociolinguistics (Spring 2013)- Tentative Course Schedule

Feb 12 (I)- Course introduction and Overview. Introduction to Whorfian Hypothesis

Feb 14 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 1. Review key terms (see syllabus).

Continue discussing Whorfian Hypothesis. Discuss Project 1

Due Fri (min. 2 pp- via email): Reflection #1: Initial Reactions and Questions from Mesthrie Ch 1.

Feb 19 (I)- Whorf “The Relation of Habitual Thought” and Boroditsky “How Language Shapes Thought” (online). Guest lecture from Prof. John Spackman (Philosophy).

Feb 21 (Th)- Pinker “Mentalese” and Casasanto “Big Bad Whorf” (online).

Class role-play/debate.

[4:30pm Linguistics lecture by Gustavo Freire (TA in Portuguese)- Robert A. Jones]

Due by Fri: Group lists and proposals for Project 1 (Moodle).

Before Tues: Watch *American Tongues* (film on reserve in Davis library).. Begin discussing online.

Feb 26 (I)- Regional Dialectology: Mesthrie Ch 2. Also read Roberts- “Vermont Lowering” (online)
Continue discussing *American Tongues*.

[4:30pm Linguistics lecture- Jamie Thomas (International Studies- Swahili)- Hilcrest 103]

Feb 28 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 3. Also read Eckert “Adolescent Language” (online).

[Thurs 2/28 and Fri 3/1: CCSRE Symposium on “Race, Ethnicity, and Migrations”]

(Over weekend: Prepare for group presentations. Also begin to think about research project and post ideas online).

Mar 5 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 4. Begin mini-presentations for Project 1
(**Due in class:** Group handout with findings and bibliography)

Mar 7 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 9. Continue mini-presentations for Project 1.

Due Mar 10 (Sun)- Project 1- Individual Reflection Paper (Moodle).

[Watch *El Norte* or *Slumdog Millionaire* for next Tues (both on LIB reserve). Begin discussing online]

Mar 12 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 5 and Ch 6. Optional: Read Wei (online). Continue discussing films.
Optional additional film on reserve: *Multilingual Hong Kong*.

Mar 14 (Th)- Guest lecture by Prof. Marcos Rohena-Madrado (Spanish). Discuss online.

Due Mar 17 (Sun)- Proposal for research project (Moodle).

Mar 19 (T)- Watch *He Said She Said* (in-class screening, or borrow from Lib reserve).
Read Tannen “Power of Talk,” as well as Cameron “What Language” OR Freed “We Understand.” Online discussion (due Tues at midnight).

[Mar 20 (W)- Linguistics lecture by Prof. Hang Du (Chinese): “Study Abroad in China: Language, Identity, and Self-presentation” 4:30pm in Hilcrest 103]

Mar 21 (Th)- **Quiz 1.** Recap language/gender discussion. Also highlight key points from Mesthrie Ch 7. Extended office hours (if needed).

Spring Break: Mar 25-29

(Before next class: Read *1984* and Orwell article. Also continue working on research project.)

Apr 2 (T)- Recap discussion on language and gender. Begin to discuss Orwell article and *1984* in small groups.

Apr 4 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 10. Continue discussing *1984*.

Due Apr 7 (Sun)- Research project: Intro/Rationale (draft) and Working Bibliography.

Apr 9 (T)- Finish discussing *1984*. Possible additional reading/film clip.

Apr 11 (Th)- Guest lecture: Prof. Nina Wieda (Russian). Language and National Identity.
Readings TBD.

Apr 16 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 8. Additional reading(s) by Nevins.(online). Research project check-in.

Apr 18 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 12. Possible Skype with Nevins.
Distribute Quiz 2 (take-home)- due Sunday.

Apr 19 (F)- URO Student Research Symposium, **attendance required.**

Due Apr 21 (Sun)- Quiz 2 (electronically).

Apr 23 (T)- Mesthrie Ch. 13. Other readings TBD.

Guest lecture on Deaf Culture: Prof. Susan Burch (American Studies).

Apr 25 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 11 and Delpit. Share from Sociolinguistics Scrapbook.

Due Apr 28 (Sun)- Sociolinguistics Scrapbook (post online)

April 30 (T) – Shapiro lecture. Readings TBD.

May 2 (Th)- Research presentations.

Due May 5 (Sun)- (Optional)- Submit draft of research paper for feedback.

May 7 (T)- Research presentations. Course evaluations.

Extended office hours (if needed).

May 9 (Th)- Research presentations. Course wrap-up.

Due May 14 (T)- Research paper, including Intro/Rationale, Methods, Findings/Discussion, and Annotated Bibliography. Also submit Researcher Memo.

Terms/Concepts from Mesthrie et al. - Ch 1

Language vs. dialect vs. variety, sign vs. object, Chomsky (contributions—esp. psycholinguistic competence), linguistic relativism, Whorfian (or Sapir-Whorf) hypothesis (strong and weak forms), denotational vs. indexical functions of language, prescriptive vs. descriptive approaches, linguistic etiquette, prestige dialect, standardization, codified forms, RP, primacy of speech, speech community (linguistic community), interactionism, diglossia, H vs. L varieties, register., Observer's Paradox (p. 90)

Looking Ahead...for Week 2 readings

Whorf: objectification, linguistic conditioning (Whorf, p. 207), linguistic relativity, gesture, concepts of space, kinship

Boroditsky: (Significance of): Color recognition, absolute (cardinal) directions, memory, temporal order, math learning, biases/attitudes,

Pinker: Language instinct, mentalese, euphemism, cognitive approaches (to language)

Cassanto: temporal metaphors, nonlinguistic perceptualmotor representations of time