LNGT 102- Introduction to Sociolinguistics (Spring 2012)

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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


Orwell, G. 1984 (novel)

These books are available in the Middlebury bookstore. Please purchase them as soon as possible. Other readings and films are available online at http://shawnashapiro.com/, or occasionally via Course Reserves at the Middlebury Library.

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.
Grading Breakdown

- Participation and Discussion [in-class and online] = 25%
- Quizzes and short assignments = 25%
  Quiz dates are on course calendar. Shorter homework assignments will 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

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, an outline/chart of key findings and examples, and a 2-3 page personal reflection (one from each group member) making connections between your findings and our course material.

Sociolinguistics Scrapbook

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 20th, which I expect you all 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

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 gather data through surveys, interviews, or observation/recording, if you wish. Alternatively (as is strongly recommended), you may analyze an existing data set such as a series of news articles or other texts, audio/video recordings (particularly
those with transcripts), or speech samples that have been made available for scholarly research (See course website for reputable sources). Your final paper (10-12 pages) will include an Introduction/Rationale for the project (~2 pp), a description of Methods (~1 p.), a Summary and Discussion of findings (4-5 pp.), and an Annotated Bibliography (single spaced) 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.

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. What unifying rhetorical strategies did Abraham Lincoln employ in his speeches leading up to the Civil War?

3. 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”?

4. What contrasting messages about racial identity are evident in the theme songs from sitcoms starring African Americans?

5. What assumptions about class (or race, gender, culture, etc.) are reflected in the Side-by-Side textbook series (for adult ESL)?

6. How do Middlebury students negotiate language choices during their study abroad experiences? Specifically, how do they remain true to the “language pledge” while still being authentic in their interactions with locals?

7. What are the types and functions of Hebrew-English code-switching between father and daughter in a telephone conversation?

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.
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 2012)- Tentative Course Schedule

Feb 14 (T)- Course introduction, overview.
Feb 16 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 1. **Due:** Reflection #1: Initial connections and questions (min. 2 pp).

Feb 21 (T)- Role-play. Prep by reading Whorf, Pinker (“Mentalese”), and Casasanto “Big Bad Whorf” (online). Discuss Project 1: Profile of a Linguistic Community
Feb 23 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 2. Also read Roberts on VT dialectology (online).
Finalize groups for Project 1 (email by Friday).
[Watch *American Tongues* (film) for Tues. Begin discussing online.]

Feb 28 (T)- Read Mesthrie Ch 3. Continue discussing *American Tongues.*
Mar 1 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 4. Also read Eckert (online).
4pm “meet and greet” w/ Prof. Rohena-Madrazo (Spanish phonology/sociolinguistics).
(Keep working on Project 1. Also begin to think about research project and post ideas online).

Mar 6 (T)- Mini-presentations for Project 1. **Due in class:** Group Outline of Key Features, Bibliography
[Watch *El Norte* or *Slumdog Millionaire* for next Tues (both on reserve). Begin discussing online]
Mar 8 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 5. Also read Wei (online). Optional film on reserve: *Multilingual Hong Kong.*

Mar 9 (F)- Language and Technology Symposium; 12:15pm-4:30pm in Axinn 229.
(Attendance expected for at least one session—hopefully all of them 😊)

**Due Mar 11 (Sun)**- Project 1- Individual Reflection Paper (electronically).

Mar 13 (T)- Continue discussing code-switching in film (*El Norte* or *Slumdog Millionaire*).
Begin discussing research methods. Prep for Quiz 1.
Mar 15 (Th)- Quiz 1. Read one or all of the articles on Sociolinguistics Research Methods (online).

**Due Mar 17 (Sun)**- Proposal for research project (electronically).
[For Thurs: *Watch He Said, She Said* (Tannen) film. Begin discussing online.]

Mar 20 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 6. Tannen- “Interactional Sociolinguistics.” Possible add’l from Pinker.
Mar 22 (Th-) Mesthrie Ch 7. Continue discussing *He Said, She Said.* Also read one or more of the critiques of Tannen: (Freed, Cameron, other?). Watch *In Depth* (film) in-class.
Extended office hours and/or research workshop (if needed).

**Spring Break:** Mar 26-30

**Due Apr 1 (Sun)**- Research project: Intro/Rationale (draft) and Working Bibliography.
(Also before next class: Read *1984* and Orwell article.)
NOTE: Some of the readings from this point on are subject to change, depending on where we are at by this point in the semester. Due dates for all assignments, however, will remain the same.

Apr 3 (T)- Discuss 1984 and Orwell article.
Apr 5 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 10. Continue discussing 1984. Optional additional readings on CDA-(online)
Late afternoon : Research workshop (if needed)
Apr 10 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 9. Also read Rickford-AAVE/creole hypothesis (online).
Possible late afternoon research workshop (optional)?
Apr 12 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 8. Additional readings from UNESCO report (online). Research project check-in.

Apr 17 (T) Mesthrie Ch 11 and other from Prof Affolter. - Guest lecture on AAVE and education.
Apr 19 (Th)- Review. Debate/Role Play on language rights. Distribute Quiz 2 (take-home).
Apr 20 (F)- URO Spring Student Symposium, attendance required.
Due Apr 22 (Sun)- Quiz 2 (electronically).

Apr 24 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 12. Read case studies of language policy/revitalization for class role play.
Apr 26 (Th)- Catch-up/Reflect. Share from Sociolinguistics Scrapbook.
Due Apr 29 (Sun)- Sociolinguistics Scrapbook (post online)

May 1 (T) Mesthrie Ch 13. Also read other from Burch (online). Joint class with Prof. Susan Burch.
Extended office hours (if needed).
May 3 (Th)- Research presentations.
Due May 6 (Sun)- (Optional)- Submit draft of research paper for feedback.

May 8 (T)- Research presentations. Course evaluations. Extended office hours (if needed).
May 10 (Th)- Research presentations. Course wrap-up.

Due May 15 (T)- Research paper, including Intro/Rationale, Methods, Findings/Discussion, and Annotated Bibliography. Also include Researcher Memo.

Terms/Concepts/People from Mesthrie et al. - Ch 1

Language vs. dialect vs. variety, Chomsky (esp. universal grammar and competence vs. performance), linguistic relativism, Whorfian (or Sapir-Whorf) hypothesis (strong and weak forms), Pinker (esp. critique of Whorf), denotational vs. indexical functions of language, prescriptivism vs. descriptivism, standardization, RP, primacy of speech, speech community (linguistic community), interactionism, diglossia, H vs. L forms, register., Observer’s Paradox