

ENGL 350-01 Language Variation in North America

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Class Room: EHFA 244
Class Time: MWF 12:00p-12:50p
Office Hours: MW 1p-2p; T 11a-12p

Language is a property of the speech community, an instrument of social communication that evolves gradually and continuously throughout human history in response to a variety of human needs.

—William Labov (1987) *Some observations on the foundation of Linguistics*

Time changes all things; there is no reason why language should escape this universal law.

—Ferdinand de Saussure (1915)

There's a southern accent, where I come from / The young uns call it country / The Yankees call it dumb / I got my own way of talkin / But everything gets done, with a southern accent / Where I come from. —Tom Petty (1985) *Southern Accents*

Course Description

Why do those people up North (i.e., Yankees) talk they way they do? How can those people in the South sound so nice yet still so dumb? Why don't the people out West have an accent? Do I have an accent? In this course, we will answer all these questions and more.

We will study the differences in the varieties of North American English from a scientific perspective being guided by contemporary sociolinguistic theory. We will focus on understanding the linguistic and social concept of a dialect. We will examine linguistic variation as it interacts with the important social factors of region, class, and gender as well as inter-/intra-speaker variation in style and the construction of identity.

Along with understanding how different varieties of English are linguistically different from each other, we will also explore issues related to the evaluation of individual dialects regarding the perceptions and attitudes of speakers and hearers of these varieties. We will address issues related to the Standard Language Ideology and even seek to uncover linguistic profiling and discrimination in the media and the education system.

Required Materials

Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes. 2006. *American English: Dialects and variation*, 2nd Ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Rosina Lippi-Green. 2012. *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. New York: Routledge.

Learning Objectives

- To apply explanations based on sociolinguistic theory to common and mythical assessments of language
- To identify aspects of structural variation in linguistic data
- To identify elements of social variation in linguistic data
- To collect and analyze linguistic data using sociolinguistic methodology, theory, and principles
- To professionally present findings on linguistic variation in both oral and written format

Course Requirements and Evaluation

In this course you will show your familiarity and synthesis of topics and theories presented in the readings through daily reading responses, homework problems, quizzes, and a midterm examination. Your ability to apply course concepts to real world data will be assessed through individual and group presentations and a major group research project involving oral and written presentation.

Course Grade Determination

• Quizzes	5%
• Reading Response / Homework	5%
• Individual Presentations	10%
• Midterm Exam	30%
• Research Proposal	5%
• Methodology Presentation	5%
• Research Presentation	10%
• Group Research Paper	30%
• TOTAL	<u>100%</u>

Quizzes

There will be 4-5 quizzes. These are meant to assess the level of attention you have given to the readings for the class period as well as your understanding of the concepts and theories discussed to that point.

Midterm Exam

There will be one exam which will occur approximately halfway through the semester. This exam will assess your level of retention of the material we have read and the concepts and theories we have discussed in class up till that point in the semester. The test may involve multiple choice, short answer, as well as essay questions.

Discussion Questions

There will be daily discussion questions due in writing on the day of class (until the end of the 2nd week after the midterm). This will consist of at least 3 open-ended questions which came to you regarding the reading assigned for that class meeting. This will be submitted to our Blackboard discussion board by 12am (midnight) of the day before the class meeting on which we discuss these readings (i.e., the day before you come to class). At the end of the week, you will be required to respond significantly to at least 2 of the discussion questions from the week on the Blackboard discussion board. The questions and responses will be assessed based on the critical insight they show into the course concepts/issues we have discussed to that point. (no discussion questions will be required on the night an individual or group is presenting)

Homework Problems

There will be homework problems at least once a week (until the end of the 2nd week after the midterm). These will involve sociolinguistic research activities which will help you to apply course concepts to real world data.

Individual Presentations

There will be at least 1 individual presentation. These presentations will ask you to synthesize and present the material from one of the readings. For these presentations, you will be responsible for leading class discussion as well as presenting all the relevant information covered in the reading.

Group Research Project

There will be a major research project involving both primary and secondary research. This project will ask you to participate as a member of a research team in which you investigate actual sociolinguistic variation in communities near campus. This multifaceted project will involve a written research proposal outlining the type of variation and the community you are investigating. This will be submitted in the 2nd week after the midterm. You will also present your proposed methodology to the class for evaluation and development and as well as participate in a critical discussion of other groups methodology. This methodology proposal will also involve submitting a written annotated bibliography of previous studies taking a similar approach to yours. After gathering your primary data, you will present your findings and preliminary analysis of these findings to the class in an oral presentation lasting 20 minutes with 5 minutes for questions. Finally, you will write a group research paper of 15-25 pages in which you discuss your linguistic variable(s), your research question(s), your speech community, previous pertinent studies, your methodology, your findings, and your analysis and discussion of those findings.

Policies and Procedures

Attendance

To do well in this class, it is essential that you be in class each meeting. If you are unable to attend a class for any reason, you are responsible for contacting me to receive any materials distributed on that day and to turn in any assignments. You will be held responsible for anything missed during an absence.

Late Work

All work must be turned in on time on the date it is due. Late work will not be accepted. (Extenuating circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis)

Academic Integrity

Cheating in any form will not be tolerated. See the university's policy on academic integrity.

Classroom Etiquette

All cell phones and iPods must be turned off and put away during class. It is disrespectful to the professor and your fellow students to be giving your attention to anything other than the class discussion taking place.

You are expected to conduct yourself in a professional manner regarding your interaction with the professor as well as with your fellow classmates. Lively discussion and multiple viewpoints are encouraged in this class; however, you are always expected to respond in a professional manner towards the ideas and opinions of your classmates.

This schedule is tentative and subject to change as necessary.

week	date	description	reading
1	14-Jan	Course overview	
	16-Jan	Defining Dialect	1 (1-8)
	18-Jan	Linguistic Facts	LG 1(5-14)
2	21-Jan	off	
	23-Jan	Intrinsic variation	LG 1 (15-21)
	25-Jan	Standard vs Vernacular	1 (9-24)
3	28-Jan	Standard Lang Myth	LG 4 (55-62)
	30-Jan	Existence of dialects (social)	2 (28-42)
	1-Jan	Existence of dialects (linguistic)	2 (43-62)
4	4-Feb	Levels of dialect (lexical and phonological)	3 (64-84)
	6-Feb	Levels of dialect (syntactic and pragmatic)	3 (85-100)
	8-Feb	Regional Dialects (elicitation and lexical variation)	5 (134-145)
5	11-Feb	Regional Dialects (phonology; NCS)	5 (146-148); ho
	13-Feb	Regional Dialects (SS)	5 (148-153); ho
	15-Feb	Dialect Diffusion (regional)	5 (153-158)
6	18-Feb	Regional Dialects (perception)	5 (159-165)
	20-Feb	Social Dialects (class and marketplace)	6 (167-172)
	22-Feb	Social Dialects (patterns and constraints)	6 (172-182)
7	25-Feb	Social Dialects (prestige and change)	6 (182-190)
	27-Feb	Gender Variation (bio/social and principles)	8 (234-242)
	29-Feb	Gender Variation (local and community based)	8 (243- 248)
8	4-Mar	Dialects and Style (shifting and attention design)	9 (265-279)
	6-Mar	Style (audience and speaker designs)	9 (279-291)
	8-Mar	Midterm	
	11-Mar	off	
	13-Mar	off	
	15-Mar	off	
9	18-Mar	Language Attitudes	
	20-Mar	Language subordination	LG 5 (66-74)
	22-Mar	The role of the educational system	LG 6 (78-97)
10	25-Mar	The role of the Entertainment Industry	LG 7 (101-126)
	27-Mar	The role of the News Media	LG 8 (130-136)
	29-Mar	off	
11	1-Apr	Methodology presentation	
	3-Apr	Methodology presentation	
	5-Apr	Methodology presentation	
12	8-Apr	Field work	
	10-Apr	Field work	
	12-Apr	Field work	
13	15-Apr	Ethnic Dialects	6 (190-209)
	17-Apr	Ethnic (AAE)	7 (211-231)

	19-Apr	Theories of gender in language	8 (234-263)
14	22-Apr	Analysis of Data (conferences)	
	24-Apr	Analysis of Data (conferences)	
	26-Apr	Analysis of Data (conferences)	
15	29-Apr	Research Presentations	
	1-May	Research Presentations	
	8-May	Final Papers Due	