

Language in a Multicultural America

ENGL 2371 (Fall 2015)
Texas Tech University

Linguistic or cultural homogeneity of even one group is in a sense a fiction... —D.P. Pattanayak

In language there are only differences. —Ferdinand de Saussure

I became Mr. Universe; I became a successful businessman. And even though some people say I still speak with a slight accent, I have reached the top of the acting profession.

—Former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

Linguistic theory is concerned with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community... —Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*

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English & Philosophy Building, Room 312C

Class Meetings: T/R, 12:30pm–1:50pm, English & Philosophy Building, Room 400

Office Hours: T/R, 2:30pm–3:30pm (please make an appointment)

About this course

Language conveys meaning. But language is more than just the content of each word: peoples' speech also carries with it cues to speakers' social realities.

In other words, variables like race, gender, sexual identity, power asymmetries, and regional identity affect a speaker's language use. This in turn informs how listeners categorize and make assumptions about their speech partners. Your social background informs the way you speak, and the way you speak impacts how people perceive you.

By the end of this course, you should be able to...

- Demonstrate understanding of the basic concepts and methods used in analyzing language and its social variation
- Collect, describe, analyze, and report linguistic phenomena using these concepts and methods
- Demonstrate awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation of the many cultures in the U.S. and the language used in these communities.

Materials

All readings will be made available on the course Blackboard site. Please contact me immediately if you cannot access the site.

Assignments and Grading

Readings and responses

The readings from this course are drawn from textbooks, scholarly articles, and popular publications (listed on the schedule on the day they're due).

For each day's reading, you should write a brief response: What did you find to be the main point? Is anything still not clear to you? Are there any points you would like to discuss as a class? Did the reading contradict any beliefs that you had? It's ok if your response has more questions than answers.

These responses will not be collected, however you may be called upon to discuss your response during class.

Homework assignments

There will be 6 homework assignments, some of which may require a small amount of writing. Assignments will be assessed for both content and written expression.

Original research project

A final paper of approximately 10 pages, based on the collection and analysis of original data, will be due on December 4th at 5:00pm. You will be conducting real sociolinguistic research on members of a speech community to which you have access. More details will be forthcoming later in the semester.

A three-page double-spaced proposal will be due on October 20th (with a rough draft due on October 8th). You will also be required to give a presentation on your project at the end of the semester.

Grade breakdown

Category	Percent	Numerical score	Letter grade
Homework assignments	50%	95–100%	A+
Research project proposal	10%	90–94.99%	A
Research project final paper	30%	85–89.99%	B+
Research project presentation	10%	80–84.99%	B
		75–79.99%	C+
		70–74.99%	C
		65–69.99%	D+
		60–64.99%	D
		>60%	F

Policies and expectations

Attendance and punctuality

You are expected to come to (every) class and to participate fully in class discussions and exercises. Please make an effort to arrive on time. (Repeat tardiness may be counted as an absence.)

If you know you will be absent, *email me ahead of time*. If the absence is documented and justifiable, it *may* be excused (at the discretion of the instructor).

After 5 unexcused absences, you will automatically receive an F for the course.

University policy (OP 34.19) requires that no penalty be imposed upon students who are absent from class because of religious observances, and allows for students to make up the work missed because of such absence. To exercise this right, *students must inform the instructor in writing prior to the absence*.

Late work

Assignments must be submitted on time—this is at the start of class, unless otherwise specified. *Assignments turned in after the deadline will receive zero points*. There is no partial credit for late work.

This course has a one-time no-questions-asked pass on this policy applicable only to homework assignments (and not to any project-related deadlines). To use it, you must email the instructor *before* the original deadline, and turn in the assignment no later than one class meeting after the original deadline.

Extraordinary circumstances

Life is complicated—illnesses and injuries happen. If these or other life events are interfering with your ability to meet course requirements, please *let me know as soon as possible*.

Email

Some course-related announcements will be made over email. These messages will be sent to your TTU address, which you should check at least daily. Failure to check your TTU email will not excuse you from any requirements assigned via email.

Please include the course number (2371) in the subject line of any emails you send me (as well as an actual subject). If you are sending from an account other than your TTU address, please include your full name in the message body.

Civility in the classroom

Students are expected to maintain a polite, civil environment that is conducive to learning for everyone.

This course deals with a number of sensitive topics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and disability. We all approach these topics with different experiences and

opinions, but in order to effectively examine the intersections of language and society, we will strive to distance ourselves from these biases and remain objective.

It is important that class discussions on sensitive topics remain respectful, and I expect you to foster a classroom environment conducive to productive discourse. If you are uncomfortable with the way something is discussed in class, or have other concerns about a topic on the syllabus, please let me know privately.

Electronic devices and cell phones

Unauthorized use of an electronic device or cell phone may result in ejection from the classroom. The use of laptops or tablets is permitted so long as (a) they are used only for note-taking or other relevant course activities, and (b) their use does not disturb other members of the class.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements, should contact the instructor as soon possible to make the necessary arrangements. Students must present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, please contact the Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or call (806) 742-2405.

Note that it is your responsibility to provide your instructor with a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) within the first week of class, or within one week of receiving the LOA, so please bring me your LOA as soon as possible. Further, the LOA becomes effective only after it is signed by the instructor, and is *not* retroactive.

Academic integrity

Cheating and plagiarism will be treated very seriously. As a general policy, all such cases will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct with a recommendation for the fullest sanctions, as well as automatic failure for the course. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with TTU's statement on academic integrity, which is available at <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentconduct/academicinteg.php>, and related policies in the Student Handbook (especially in Part II, Section B, Subsection 1), which is available at <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/handbook/>.

You are encouraged to form study groups outside of class to help you understand the course material and discuss readings. You may not collaborate on homework assignments.

I will allow multiple-author research projects on a case-by-case basis, though note that the scope of any such project would necessarily be greater than a single-author project. Please see me as early as possible if this option interests you.

If you have any questions, please consult the instructor, a dean, or the University's academic integrity policy.

Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Please pay attention for announcements in class and via email.

Ⓜ HW due
 ℝ Reading due
 ℝ^S Suggested reading
 ℙ Project-related deadline

Introduction

T	8/25	Syllabus Introductions		
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R	8/27	Online lecture: What is language? What is (socio-)linguistics? Goals of the course		
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T	9/1	Review What does it mean to know a language? Language variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>Language myths</i> Ch. 10 · Wardhaugh, pp. 1–6 · <i>Body ritual among the Nacirema</i> (Miner 1956) 	ℝ ℝ ℝ
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R	9/3	Speech communities The scientific study of language Observer's Paradox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Wardhaugh, pp. 8–12, 17–19, 119–129 	ℝ

Identity of Place

T	9/8	The fourth floor <i>American Tongues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · HW 1 due 	Ⓜ
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R	9/10	<i>American Tongues</i> National identity American identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Coulmas, pp. 171–177 · <i>English is a dialect with an army</i> (Coates) · <i>Language in the USA</i> ch. 2 	ℝ ℝ ℝ ^S

T	9/15	Regional variation in the US Regional identity in the US	· <i>Language Myths</i> ch. 17 · <i>Language in the USA</i> pp. 39–44, 53–55 · <i>Language Myths</i> ch. 20 · <i>The grammar rules behind 3 commonly disparaged dialects</i> (Okrent)	ℝ ℝ ℝ ℝ
R	9/17	The language(s) of Texas <i>Do You Speak American Pt. 2</i>	·Wardhaugh, pp. 88, 96–100, 101–117 · <i>Language Diversity in the USA</i> ch. 4, pp. 66–72, 75–80	ℝ ℝ ^S
T	9/22	<i>Do You Speak American Pt. 2</i>	·HW 2 due	HI

Privileged Language

R	9/24	What’s “(non-)standard”? Why speak the standard?	·Wardhaugh, pp. 49–54	ℝ
T	9/29	Attitudes towards speech Politeness and solidarity T/V distinctions Class and prestige	· <i>Language in the USA</i> Ch. 26 ·Wardhaugh, pp. 260–262, 267–269, 276–277, 281–282 ·Wardhaugh, pp. 146–153 ·Coulmas, pp. 17–18, 27–30	ℝ ℝ ℝ ℝ
R	10/1	Workshop: Collecting sociolinguistic data	·Wardhaugh, pp. 153–159	ℝ

Personal Identity

T	10/6	Social circles Jocks vs. burnouts	·HW 3 due ·Wardhaugh, pp. 129–132, 212 · <i>Language in the USA</i> , ch. 19, pp. 370–372	HI ℝ ℝ
R	10/8	Race and ethnicity Linguistic profiling	·Project proposal rough draft due ·Smith/NPR (2001) podcast ·Laferriere 1979	P ℝ ℝ

T	10/13	AAVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Wardhaugh, pp. 342–345 ·<i>The Chicago accent and the Chicago ‘blaccent’</i> (Minoff/WBEZ) ·<i>Language in the USA</i>, ch. 5 ·Clip from testimony of Rachel Jeantel ·<i>Rachel Jeantel’s language is English</i> (Bolotnikova) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ℝ ℝ ℝ ℝ ℝ
R	10/15	<i>Do you Speak American</i> (pt. 3) Sex and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·HW 4 due ·Meyerhoff, pp. 201–202, 206, 225–227 ·<i>Language Myths</i> ch. 6 ·Coulmas pp. 36–41 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HI ℝ ℝ ℝ
T	10/20	Sex and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Project proposal final draft due ·West and Zimmerman 1983 ·Kiesling 2007, pp. 653–658, 660–662, 666–667, 669–670 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P ℝ^S
R	10/22	Sexual orientation Transgender speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·<i>Go Carolina</i> (Sedaris) ·<i>Language and Sexuality</i> ch. 4, pp. 74–80, 86–92, 98–102 ·<i>Zimman 2013</i>, endnote 1 (p. 34), pp. 1–3, 33–34 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ℝ ℝ ℝ
Society				
T	10/27	Codes and secret languages (Dis-)ability Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·HW 5 due ·<i>Dealing with people first language</i> (Donovan) ·<i>People first language</i> ·<i>Language in the USA</i>, ch. 18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HI ℝ ℝ ℝ

R	10/29	The “Ebonics” controversy Official languages English-only Extermination/Preservation	· <i>‘Black English’ proposal draws fire</i> (CNN) · <i>Elements of Igno-Ebonics Style</i> (Cosby) · <i>Language in the USA</i> , ch. 17 · <i>Language Diversity in the USA</i> , ch. 3	ℝ ℝ ℝ ℝ ^S
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T	11/3	Politics	· <i>The war of the words</i> (The Economist) · <i>Don’t think of an elephant</i> , ch. 1, pp. 1–4, 21–26	ℝ ℝ
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Signed Languages and the Deaf Community

R	11/5	ASL and the Deaf community Sociolinguistic variation within ASL	· HW 6 due · <i>Language in the USA</i> , ch. 12 · <i>The sociolinguistics of sign language</i> , ch. 4, pp. 61–63, 76–77, 84–85, 87, 95–97	ℝ ℝ ℝ
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T	11/10	Cochlear implants <i>Sound and Fury</i>		
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Original Research Projects

R	11/12	Student presentations		
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T	11/17	Student presentations		
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R	11/19	Student presentations		
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T	11/24	Workshop: Original research project		
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R	11/26	No class — Thanksgiving recess		
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T	12/1	Workshop: Original research project		
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F	12/4		· Original research project due at 5pm	ℙ
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