

# Language in a Multicultural America

ENGL 2371 (Spring 2019)  
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*

**Instructor:** Dr. Aaron Braver  
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**Web:** <http://www.aaronbraver.com>  
**Office:** English & Philosophy Building, Room 312C

**Class meetings:** T/Th, 12:30pm–1:50pm  
English & Philosophy Building, Room 351

**Office Hours:** T/Th, 11:30am–12:20pm, and by appointment  
Be sure to reserve a slot: <http://www.aaronbraver.com/officehours>

**Course website:** On Blackboard (<http://ttu.blackboard.com>)

## 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

The readings for this course are drawn from textbooks, scholarly articles, and popular publications.

You should be prepared to discuss the readings on the day they are listed on the syllabus—you may be called upon for your thoughts during class.

### Homework assignments

There will be 6 homework assignments. 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 Tuesday, May 7<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm. 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 March 7<sup>th</sup> (with a rough draft due on February 28<sup>th</sup>). 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	40%	95–100%	A+
In-class participation	10%	90–94.99%	A
Research project proposal	10%	85–89.99%	B+
Research project final paper	30%	80–84.99%	B
Research project presentation	10%	75–79.99%	C+
		70–74.99%	C
		65–69.99%	D+
		60–64.99%	D
		>60%	F

# Policies and expectations

## Attendance, punctuality, and participation

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.

Participation counts for 10% of your grade in this course. A student who attends class regularly and does not disrupt other students, but does not otherwise contribute, will earn at best a C for this category.

Ways to earn a <i>better</i> participation grade	Ways to earn a <i>worse</i> participation grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attempt to answer questions (even if you're not sure!)</li><li>• Ask questions about the material being discussed or course readings</li><li>• Share comments about relevant outside information</li><li>• Come to office hours</li><li>• Email me with questions and comments about course content</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have unexcused absences</li><li>• Frequently arrive to class late</li><li>• Fail to pay attention during class</li><li>• Use electronic devices for non-course activities</li><li>• Engage in disruptive or distracting behavior</li><li>• Disrespect others</li></ul>

## Religious holy days

Texas law requires institutions of higher education to excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day. The student shall also be excused for time necessary to travel.

An institution may not penalize the student for the absence and allows for the student to take an exam or complete an assignment from which the student is excused. The student should make up any missed work.

TTU policy indicates that a student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known to the instructor prior to the absence.

See OP 34.19 at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.19.pdf> for more information.

## **Late work**

Assignments must be submitted on time—this is at the start of class on the due date, 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 aspect of the research project). 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 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 and electronic devices**

Students are expected to maintain a polite, civil environment that is conducive to learning for everyone. This includes refraining from non-approved uses of electronic devices, or use of such devices that becomes distracting for other students.

Breaches of decorum may result in expulsion from the classroom or consequences for your final grade.
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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 of 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.

## **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 should 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.

## **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, including 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 Part I, Section B, Subsection 1 (<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/handbook/conduct.php>) and Part II, Section B (<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/handbook/community.php>).

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

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

## **TTU resources for a safe, inclusive campus**

Texas Tech University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from gender and/or sex discrimination of any kind. Sexual assault, discrimination, harassment, and other Title IX violations are not tolerated by the University. Report any incidents to the Office for Student Rights & Resolution, (806)-742-SAFE (7233) or file a report online at <http://titleix.ttu.edu/students>.

I identify as an ally to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community, and I am available to listen and support you in an affirming manner. I can assist in connecting you with resources on campus to address problems you may face pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity that could interfere with your success at Texas Tech. Please note that additional resources are available through the Office of LGBTQIA within the Center for Campus Life, Student Union Building Room 201, <http://www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu>, (806) 742-5433.

Faculty and staff members at TTU are committed to connecting you to resources on campus. Some of these available resources are:

- TTU Student Counseling Center, (806) 742-3674, <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/> (provides confidential support on campus)
- TTU 24-hour Crisis Helpline, (806) 742-5555 (assists students who are experiencing a mental health or interpersonal violence crisis. If you call the helpline, you will speak with a mental health counselor)

- Voice of Hope Lubbock Rape Crisis Center, (806) 763-7273, <http://voiceofhopelubbock.org> (24-hour hotline that provides support for survivors of sexual violence)
- The Risk, Intervention, Safety and Education (RISE) Office, (806) 742-2110, <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/rise/> (provides a range of resources and support options focused on prevention education and student wellness)
- Texas Tech Police Department, (806) 742-3931, <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/ttpd/> (to report criminal activity that occurs on or near Texas Tech campus)

## Schedule

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

### Introduction

Th	01/17	Syllabus Introductions	
T	01/22	What is language? What is (socio-)linguistics? Goals of the course	
Th	01/24	What does it mean to know a language? Language variation	·Language myths ch. 10 ·Wardhaugh pp. 1–6 ·Body ritual among the Nacirema
T	01/29	Speech communities The scientific study of language The observer's paradox	·Wardhaugh pp. 8–12, 17–19, 119–129

### Identity of place

Th	01/31	The fourth floor experiment <i>American tongues</i>	·HW 1 (Intro) due
T	02/05	<i>American tongues</i> National identity American identity	·Coulmas pp. 171–177 ·English is a dialect with an army (Coates) ·Language in the USA ch. 2

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Th	02/07	Regional variation in the US Regional identity in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·Language myths ch. 17</li> <li>·Language in the USA pp. 39–44, 53–55</li> <li>·Language mythc ch. 20</li> <li>·The grammar rules behind 3 commonly disparaged dialects (Okrent)</li> </ul>
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T	02/12	The language(s) of Texas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·<b>HW 2 (Regional identity) due</b></li> <li>·Wardhaugh pp. 88, 96–100, 101–117</li> <li>·Language diversity in the USA ch. 4 (pp. 66–72, 75–80)</li> </ul>
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Th	02/14	<i>Do you speak American?</i> part 2	

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**Privileged language**

T	02/19	What's (non-)standard? Attitudes towards speech Politeness and solidarity Class and prestige	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·Wardhaugh pp. 49–54</li> <li>·Language in the USA ch. 26</li> <li>·Wardhaugh pp. 260–262, 267–269, 276–277, 281–282</li> <li>·Wardhaugh pp. 146–153</li> <li>·Coulmas pp. 17–18, 27–30</li> </ul>
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Th	02/21	Workshop: Collecting sociolinguistic data	·Wardhaugh pp. 153–159

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**Personal identity**

T	02/26	Social circles Jocks vs. burnouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·<b>HW 3 (Privileged language) due</b></li> <li>·Wardhaugh pp. 129–132, 212</li> <li>·Language in the USA ch. 19 (pp.370–372)</li> </ul>
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Th	02/28	Race and ethnicity Linguistic profiling AAVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·<b>Project proposal rough draft due</b></li> <li>·Smith/NPR (2001) podcast</li> <li>·Laferrier 1979</li> <li>·Wardhaugh pp. 342–345</li> <li>·The Chicago accent and the Chicago ‘blaccent’ (Minoff/WBEZ)</li> <li>·Language in the USA ch. 5</li> <li>·Clips from testimony of Rachel Jeantel</li> <li>·Rachel Jeantel’s language is English</li> </ul>
T	03/05	<i>Do you speak American?</i> part 3 Sex and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·<b>HW 4 (Personal identity pt. 1) due</b></li> <li>·Meyerhoff pp. 201–202, 206, 225–227</li> <li>·Languahge myths ch. 6</li> <li>·Coulmas pp. 36–41</li> </ul>
Th	03/07	Sex and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·<b>Project proposal final draft due</b></li> <li>·West and Zimmerman 1983</li> <li>·Kiesling 2007 pp. 653–658, 660–662, 666–667, 669–670</li> </ul>
T	03/12	No class — Spring break	
Th	03/14	No class — Spring break	
T	03/19	Sexual orientation Transgender speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·Go Carolina (Sedaris)</li> <li>·Language and Sexuality ch. 4 (pp. 74–80, 86–92, 98–102)</li> <li>·Zimman 2013 endnote 1 (p. 34), pp. 1–3, 33–34</li> </ul>

Society



Th	03/21	Codes and secret languages (Dis-)ability Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·<b>HW 5 (Personal identity pt. 2) due</b></li> <li>·Dealing with people first language (Donovan)</li> <li>·People first language</li> <li>·Language in the USA ch. 18</li> </ul>
T	03/26	The 'Ebonics' controversy Official languages English-only Language extermination/preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·'Black English' proposal draws fire (CNN)</li> <li>·Elements of Igno-Ebonics Style (Cosby)</li> <li>·Language in the USA ch. 17</li> <li>·Language diversity in the USA ch. 3</li> </ul>
Th	03/28	Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·The war of words (The Economist)</li> <li>·Don't think of an elephant ch. 1 (pp. 1-4, 21-26)</li> </ul>
T	04/02	ASL and the Deaf community Sociolinguistic variation in ASL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>·<b>HW 6 (Society) due</b></li> <li>·Language in the USA ch. 12</li> <li>·The sociolinguistics of sign language ch. 4 (pp. 62-63, 76-77, 84-85, 87, 95-97)</li> </ul>
Th	04/04	Cochlear implants <i>Sound and Fury</i>	
<b>Research projects</b>			
T	04/09	Student presentations	
Th	04/11	Student presentations	
T	04/16	Student presentations	
Th	04/18	Project workshop	
T	04/23	Project workshop	

## Language contact

Th 04/25 Language contact  
Pidgins and creoles

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T 04/30 Language displacement and death

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Th 05/02 TBD

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T 05/07 Wrap-up and evaluations

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**Research project due at 11:59pm**