

# LNGT 102- Introduction to Sociolinguistics (Spring 2014)

Dr. Shawna Shapiro, Middlebury College

**Contact info:** Email: [sshapiro@middlebury.edu](mailto:sshapiro@middlebury.edu) Phone: x5977 (campus) or 206.919.6060 (cell)  
Office Hours (in Voter 109): Tues/Thurs 3:00-4:30pm (or by appt)

## 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 behaviors of groups and individuals?
4. What sorts of methods and questions have been central to sociolinguistic research over time?
5. What role has language played in public debates about politics, education, social justice, etc.?
6. What questions will likely be most pertinent to sociolinguistics in coming years?

## Required Reading List

1. Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert, and Leap (2009). *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (2<sup>nd</sup> 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 both the Linguistics Symposium on Bilingualism on Fri March 7<sup>th</sup> and the URO Student Research Symposium on Friday April 11<sup>th</sup> .

### **Grading Breakdown**

- ❖ Participation and Discussion [in-class and online] = 25%
- ❖ Quiz, response essays, and other assignments = 25%  
Quiz and essay due 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 presentation, 10% indiv paper)
  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 11<sup>th</sup>, 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. What are the beliefs and practices of Vermont parents about correcting grammar/pronunciation errors in their children's speech?
6. How does the Simpsons character Cletus both reinforce and resist stereotypes about Appalachian English?
7. How do female students at Middlebury feel about the greetings "man," "dude" and "guys"?
8. 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tentative Course Schedule for LNGT 102- Spring 2014

Feb 11 (T)- Course introduction and Overview. Introduction to Whorfian Hypothesis

Feb 13 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 1. Review key terms (p. 6 of syllabus). Continue discussing Whorfian Hypothesis and other key concepts. Discuss Project 1

**Due by Sun 2/16:** Post to Moodle online discussion about Mesthrie Ch 1. Begin exploring Project 1 possibilities with classmates online.

Feb 18 (T)- Whorf “The Relation of Habitual Thought” and Boroditsky “How Language Shapes Thought” (both on Moodle). Guest lecture from Prof. John Spackman (Philosophy).

Feb 20 (Th)- Pinker “Mentalese” and Casasanto “Big Bad Whorf” (both on Moodle).

Class role-play/debate.

**Due by Fri 2/22:** Group lists and proposals for Project 1 (on Moodle).

[Before Tues 2/25: Watch *American Tongues* (film on reserve in Davis library). Begin discussing online.]

Feb 25 (T)- Regional Dialectology: Mesthrie Ch 2. Also read one of the additional readings on Moodle (Roberts, Preston, Eckert, Karstadt, etc.) and prepare to share reactions in class. Continue discussing *American Tongues*.

Feb 27 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 3. Additional reading from Averini (on Moodle).

Guest Skype from Prof. Netta Avineri (MIIS) on Yiddish learners as a linguistic community.

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

Mar 4 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 5 and code-switching samples (Moodle).

Begin mini-presentations for Project 1

**(Due in class:** Group handout with abstract and bibliography)

Mar 6 (Th)-. Mesthrie Ch 6. Possible additional article or literary piece.

Continue mini-presentations for Project 1. (Possible guest lecture??)  
[Fri March 7<sup>th</sup> Bilingualism Symposium-- **Attendance required**]

**Due** Mar 9 (Sun)- Project 1- Individual Reflection Paper (Moodle).

[Watch *El Norte*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, or *Multilingual Hong Kong* for next Tues (all on LIB reserve).  
Begin discussing online]

Mar 11 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 4 and Ch 9. Also check out audio/film clips (on Moodle).

Mar 13 (Th)- Continue discussing language contact/variation. Review for quiz.

Mar 18 (T)- **Quiz 1.**

Mar 20 (Th)- **Online Class.** Read Mesthrie Ch 7, Tannen “Power of Talk,” and either Cameron “What Language” OR Freed “We Understand.” Respond to online discussion (by Friday at midnight).

### **Spring Break: March 24-28**

(Before next class: Read *1984* and Orwell article. Also start exploring for research project.)

Apr 1 (T)- Recap discussion on language and gender. Begin to discuss Orwell article and *1984* in small groups.

Apr 3 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 10. Continue discussing *1984*.

**Due** Apr 6 (Sun)- Proposal + Working Bibliography for research project. (on Moodle)

Apr 8 (T)- Finish discussing *1984*. Possible additional reading (on standardization, etc.).

Apr 10 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 8. Possible additional reading (on World Englishes or other topic).

[Apr 11 (F)- URO Student Research Symposium, **attendance required.**]

Apr 15 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 12. Additional reading TBD.

Guest lecture from Assistant Professor of Russian, Nina Wieda.

Apr 17 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 11 and Delpit (on Moodle)

**Due** Apr 20 (Sun)- Intro/Rationale for research project. (on Moodle)

Apr 22 (T)- Shapiro lecture. Reading(s) on Moodle.

Apr 24 (Th)- Due before class: Response essays (1-2 pp each, responding to 2 of 5 prompts). /  
Also share from Sociolinguistics Scrapbook.

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

April 29 (T) – Student choice: Choose from a selection of readings/film and report back to class.

(Mesthrie Ch 13/Deaf Culture, literary pieces, or films on bilingual education, World Englishes, etc.)

May 1 (Th)- Research presentations I. Possible short additional reading.

**Due** May 4 (Sun)- (Optional)- Submit draft of research paper for feedback.

May 6 (T)- Research presentations II. Course evaluations.

Extended office hours (if needed).

May 8 (Th)- Research presentations III. Course wrap-up.

**Due** May 13 (T)- Research paper, including Intro/Rationale, Methods, Findings/Discussion, and Annotated Bibliography. Also submit Researcher Memo.

---

### **Terms/concepts for Mesthrie et al. - Ch 1**

Language vs. dialect vs. variety, sign vs. object, Chomsky (—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)

### **A few terms/concepts 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 perceptual-motor, representations of time