

LNGT 102- Introduction to Sociolinguistics (Fall 2016)

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Office Hours (in Carr Hall 201): 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.

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, register, or style?
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 sociolinguistics research over time?
5. What role has language played in public debates about politics, education, social justice, etc.?
6. What issues are emerging in current research in sociolinguistics?

Students will develop skills in the following:

- Applying theoretical concepts to linguistic artifacts (speech, text, multi-media, etc.)
- Explaining the relevance of sociolinguistics to the world around us
- Evaluating and responding to various perspectives on complex questions about language
- Designing projects that investigate linguistic communities and practices
- Gathering and analyzing linguistic data
- Writing about sociolinguistics concepts from both personal and critical/analytical perspectives

Required Reading List

1. Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert, and Leap (2009). *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (2nd Ed) John Benjamins. (Also available as e-book, including through Midd Libraries).
2. Orwell, G. *1984* (novel).

These two books are available in the Middlebury bookstore. Please purchase them as soon as possible.

3. Other readings, films, and supplementary materials will be available via Canvas ([go/coursehub](#)), or via Davis Library Reserves (via Circulation Desk)

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—ideally with some of your classmates!

I also expect that you will organize yourself so that you are prepared for class and can submit assignments on time. This includes

- Making time to do the readings before class, focusing in particular on terminology
- Having a folder/notebook in which to keep course handouts and other materials
- Using multiple strategies to back up your work (Note: A computer crash is NOT an excuse for late work!)

Grading Breakdown

(Due dates for all items below are on the course calendar. Shorter homework assignments may be given from time to time, to help you engage more fully with readings or film)

- I. Preparation for class and Participation/Discussion [in-class and online] = 20%
- II. Quiz, on essential terms and concepts from class = 10%
- III. Critique Paper on Orwell/*1984* (3-4 pp.) = 10%

Key questions:

1. In what ways does Orwell's work echo concepts and research findings in Sociolinguistics?
 2. What is one (or more) critique that linguists might make of Orwell's ideas about language? (In other words...In what ways might his views of language seem outdated or inaccurate, from the perspective of Sociolinguistics researchers?)
- IV. Projects (3 total) = 60%
 1. Profile of a Linguistic Community = 15% (5% group presentation and abstract/bibliography; 10% Response Paper)
 2. Sociolinguistics Scrapbook = 15%
 3. Independent Research Project = 30% (20% final paper, 5% presentation, 5% scaffolding assignments- proposal, annotated bibliography, etc.)

Overview of Major Projects:

(NOTE: More details for each assignment will be provided in class)

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 (5-8 min) group presentation, an abstract and bibliography (1 per group, posted on Canvas), and a 2-3 page Response Paper (one from each group member) answering these two questions:

- What are some of the most interesting features of this linguistic community? (discuss general trends as well as specific examples).
- How has studying this community enriched (and even complicated!) your understanding of Sociolinguistics? (reference particular course theories/concepts)

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 11th, 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. What contrasting messages about racial identity are evident in the theme songs from 1970s sitcoms starring African Americans?
3. What are the attitudes of Japanese students and professors toward Ryukyuan (endangered) languages in Southern Japan?
4. What are the beliefs and practices of Vermont parents about correcting grammar/pronunciation errors in their children's speech?
5. How does the Simpsons character Cletus both reinforce and resist stereotypes about Appalachian English?
6. How do female students at Middlebury feel about the greetings "man," "dude" and "guys"?
7. 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: *I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.*

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 learning challenge 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- Fall 2016

Sept 13 (T)- Course introduction and Overview. Introduction to Whorfian Hypothesis
Sept 15 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 1. Review key terms (see handout, also on Canvas). Continue discussing Whorfian Hypothesis and other key concepts. Discuss Project 1. Preview Boroditsky and Whorf.

[Over weekend: Post ideas for Project 1 and/or respond to ideas from others].

Sept 20 (T)- Whorf “The Relation of Habitual Thought” and Boroditsky “How Language Shapes Thought” (both on Canvas). Guest lecture from Prof. John Spackman (Philosophy).

Sept 22 (Th)- Pinker “Mentalese” and Casasanto “Big Bad Whorf” (both on Canvas).
Class role-play/debate. Discuss groups for Project 1.

Due by Fri 9/23: Group lists for Project 1 (1 member post names and topic on Canvas).

Due by Sun 9/25: Group Proposal for Project 1:

1. Which linguistic community do you intend to study?
2. What aspects of this community will you examine most closely?
3. What sources will you draw on?
4. Which concepts from class (thus far) do you expect to be most relevant?

[Over weekend: Watch *American Tongues* (film on reserve or streaming via Davis library).
Post to Canvas online discussion by Mon 9/26]

Sept 27 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 2 (Regional Dialectology). Also skim Roberts OR Eckert-(both on Canvas) and prepare to share reactions in class. Continue discussing *American Tongues*.

Sept 29 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 3 (Social Dialectology). Possible additional reading (on Canvas).
Connect to Project 1.

[Over the weekend: Prepare for group presentations.]

Oct 4 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 5 (Language Choice and Code-switching). Also see online code-switching samples (Canvas). Begin mini-presentations for Project 1

*Oct 5th, 4:30pm- Shapiro faculty lecture on literacy education research in refugee resettlement areas.

Due by Oct 5 (Wed, midnight) on Canvas : Group abstract and bibliography for Project 1

Oct 6 (Th)-. Mesthrie Ch 6 (Language in interaction). Continue mini-presentations for Project 1.

Due Oct 9 (Sun)- Response Paper from Project 1 (2-3 pp., on Canvas—see Qs in syllabus).

[For Tues : Watch *El Norte* or *Slumdog Millionaire* for next Tues—both on reserve at Davis Library and possibly online streaming. Begin discussing online- post before 12pm on Tues 11/11]

Oct 11 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 4 (Language Variation and Change). Continue discussing films.

Oct 13 (Th)- Review for quiz. Begin discussing final project.

Oct 18 (T)- **NO CLASS**, but prep for quiz and do some thinking about final project!

Corrected 9/20/16

Oct 20- **Quiz.** Begin discussing Mesthrie Ch 7 (Gender and Language Use).

[Over weekend, post ideas for final project to Canvas. Also start reading *1984*, for Tues 11/1]

Oct 25 (T)- Read Tannen “Power of Talk,” and either Cameron ““What Language” OR Freed “We Understand.” (Gender and Language, cont’d). Respond to online discussion by Wed 10/24.

Oct 27 (Th)- Recap discussion on language and gender. Preview Orwell article and discuss background for *1984*.

Due Oct 30 (Sun): Post proposal(s) for final project:

1. What question would you like to answer, and why is this a relevant question?
2. What data will you analyze? (and How will you collect it, if necessary)?
3. What do you expect to find (i.e., your hypothesis)?
4. What do you need (from Prof S. or other sources) to be successful in this project?

Nov 1 (T)- Orwell “Politics” (on Canvas) and first half of *1984*. Form panels for Thurs.

Nov 3 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 10 (Language and Power). Panel discussions of *1984*.

Due Nov 6 (Sun)- Sociolinguistic Critique of Orwell/*1984* (3-4 pp., on Canvas)

Nov 8 (T)- Finish discussing *1984*. Possible additional reading. Also preview readings for Thurs.
Discuss Sociolinguistics Scrapbook.

Nov 10 (Th)- Readings TBD on Deaf culture/ASL. Visit from Prof. Susan Burch (Amer Studies)

Nov 15 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 8 (Language Maintenance, Shift, and Death) **OR**
Mesthrie 9 (Pidgins, Creoles, and “New Englishes”). Jigsaw teaching in class.

Nov 17 (Th)- Mesthrie Ch 11 (Sociolinguistics and Education) and Delpit (on Canvas)

Due Nov 20 (Sun)- Intro/Rationale OR Methods/Initial Findings for research project (on Canvas).

Nov 22 (T)- Mesthrie Ch 12 (Language Planning and Policy). Visit from Prof. Aloni (Hebrew).
[If time: Share 1 item from Sociolinguistics Scrapbook in class.]

Nov 24 (Th)- **THANKSGIVING**- no class.

Due Nov 28 (Mon, midnight)- Sociolinguistics Scrapbook (on Canvas, post to group discussion)

Nov 29 (T) – Visit from Profs. Baird and Rohena-Madrazo (Spanish). Reading TBD.

Dec 1 (Th)- Topic TBD (Shapiro’s research? bilingual education? World Englishes?).

Due Dec 4 (Sun)- (Optional, but recommended!)- Submit draft or outline of research paper for feedback.

Dec 6 (T)- Research presentations I. Course evaluations.

Dec 8 (Th)- Research presentations II. Course wrap-up.

Due Dec 13 (T)- Research paper (on Canvas), including Intro/Rationale, Methods, Findings/
Discussion, and Annotated Bibliography. Also submit Researcher Memo (sep Canvas link).