

Language in a Multicultural America

ENGL 2371 (Fall 2016)
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
aaron.braver@ttu.edu
<http://www.aaronbraver.com>
English & Philosophy Building, Room 312C

Class Meetings: T/Th, 2:00pm–3:20pm, English & Philosophy Building, Room 360

Office Hours: T/Th, 1:00pm–1:50pm
Be sure to reserve a slot: <http://www.aaronbraver.com/officehours>

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. 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 8th 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 October 18th (with a rough draft due on October 11th). 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 in-class assignments or exams). 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.

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 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 Accomodation (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 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. You may collaborate on homework assignments only as described above.

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.

Introduction

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic(s)</u>	<u>Reading/Assignments</u>
T 8/30	Syllabus Introductions	
Th 9/1	What is language? What is (socio-)linguistics? Goals of the course	
T 9/6	What does it mean to know a language? Language variation	·Language myths ch. 10 ·Wardhaugh, pp. 1–6 ·Body ritual among the Nacirema
Th 9/8	Speech communities The scientific study of language The Observer's Paradox	·Wardhaugh, pp. 8–12, 17–19, 119–129

Identity of place

T 9/13	The fourth floor <i>American Tongues</i>	·HW 1 (Intro) due
Th 9/15	<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

T 9/20 Regional variation in the US
Regional identity in the US

- Language myths ch. 17
- Language in the USA pp. 39–44, 53–55
- Language Myths ch. 20
- The grammar rules behind 3 commonly disparaged dialects (Okrent)

Th 9/22 The language(s) of Texas

- Wardhaugh pp. 88, 96–100, 101–117
- Language diversity in the USA ch. 4, pp. 66–72, 75–80
- HW 2 (Regional identity) due**

T 9/27 *Do you speak American?* part 2

Privileged language

Th 9/29 What's (non-)standard?
Attitudes towards speech
Politeness and solidarity
Class and prestige

- Wardhaugh pp. 49–54
- Language in the USA ch. 26
- Wardhaugh pp. 260–262, 267–269, 276–277, 281–282
- Wardhaugh pp. 146–153
- Coulmas pp. 17–18, 27–30

T 10/4 Workshop: Collecting sociolinguistic data

- Wardhaugh pp. 153–159

Personal identity

Th 10/6 Social circles
Jocks vs. burnouts

- HW 3 (Privileged language) due**
- Wardhaugh pp. 129–132, 212
- Language in the USA ch. 19, pp. 370–372

T	10/11	Race and ethnicity Linguistic profiling AAVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Project proposal rough draft due ·Smith/NPR (2001) podcast ·Laferrier 1979 ·Wardhaugh pp. 342–345 ·The Chicago accent and the Chicago ‘blaccent’ (Minoff/WBEZ) ·Language in the USA ch. 5 ·Clip from testimony of Rachel Jeantel ·Rachel Jeantel’s language is English
Th	10/13	<i>Do you speak American?</i> part 3 Sex and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·HW 4 (Personal identity pt. 1) due ·Meyerhoff pp. 201–202, 206, 225–227 ·Language myths ch. 6 ·Coulmas pp. 36–41
T	10/18	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
Th	10/20	Sexual orientation Transgender speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Go Carolina (Sedaris) ·Language and Sexuality ch. 4 pp. 74–80, 86–92, 98–102 ·Zimman 2013 endnote 1 (p. 34), pp. 1–3, 33–34

Society

T	10/25	Codes and secret languages (Dis-)ability Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·HW 5 (Personal identity pt. 2) due ·Dealing with people first language (Donovan) ·People first language ·Language in the USA ch. 18
---	-------	--	--

Th	10/27	The 'Ebonics' controversy Official languages English-only Language extermination/preservation	·'Back English' proposal draws fire (CNN) ·Elements of Igno-Ebonics Style (Cosby) ·Language in the USA ch. 17 ·Language diversity in the USA ch. 3
T	11/1	Politics	·The war of the words (The Economist) ·Don't think of an elephant ch. 1, pp. 1-4, 21-26
Th	11/3	ASL and the Deaf community Sociolinguistic variation in ASL	· HW 6 (Society) due ·Language in the USA ch. 12 ·The sociolinguistics of sign language ch. 4, pp. 61-63, 76-77, 84-85, 87, 95-97
T	11/8	Cochlear implants <i>Sound and Fury</i>	

Original research projects

Th	11/10	Student presentations	
T	11/15	Student presentations	
Th	11/17	Student presentations	
T	11/22	Workshop: Original research project	
Th	11/24	Thanksgiving	
T	11/29	Workshop: Original research project	

Th 12/1 Special topic TBD

T 12/6 Special topic TBD

Th 12/8 **Original research project due at 11:59pm**
