HU343 Language in Society Winter 99-00
Syllabus

Professor: Victoria Bergvall
Office: Walker 329C
Phone: 487-3248

Course times: TR 3:35-4:50
Room: Walker 109
E-mail: vbergval@mtu.edu

Office hours: I am very happy to talk with you outside of class, either individually or in groups, in person or via e-mail or phone. I will generally hold office hours on Tuesdays 11-12 & Thursdays 2-3, notifying you when I cannot make those times. I may also be available the half hour right after class and at other times by appointment. (Please arrange alternative times with me in class, by phone, or e-mail).

Catalog description
(0-3-0); Approved ABET elective.
Thematic cluster: 103 Communication & Its contexts
The uses of language in our society. Topics may include the functions of language in power, the shaping of reality, dialects, gender, Black English, bilingualism, standards of correctness, the drive to make English the national language, slang and jargon, and propaganda. Students may carry out observational studies on language use.

Course description for this term
Language has been called a "social mirror," reflecting who we are, where we are from, and who we interact with. However, language has increasingly come to be seen as a tool of social construction as well. It does not simply reflect some amalgamation of our past, but is critically involved in shaping our future. We use language to construct our personas, to ally ourselves with some groups and distance ourselves from others, to project ourselves into some futures and away from others. However, not all these social constructions are evident to casual observers of language. Hence, one goal of our work this term is to bring to conscious awareness just how we use language as we build and interact with the societies around us. A second goal is to consider our attitudes towards language, including many common myths. What linguists know about language is often at odds with prevailing opinion, and we will study—and remedy—that disjunction.

The centerpiece of the course this term, however, is dialects: what they are, how they are formed, maintained, and lost; what their linguistic features are, and, most significantly, how they function to group and stratify society. As an example of dialect study, we will closely examine the language of the local area, examining its history through the mining era, down through the present day. Students will work together in groups to conduct original research in one of three ways: 1) collecting data on the present linguistic variations of local residents, as well as attitudes towards these variations; 2) collecting oral linguistic histories of older, long-term residents of the area; or 3) working with historical documents available in the MTU archives. Through this research project, we will come to understand how linguists gather and interpret sociolinguistic data, and understand the significance of linguistic variation in our society. By closely examining how it is that people use language, we should come to understand when and why we and others use it differently, and in the process, learn how we may become more adept in our own language use.

NOTE: Common abbreviations for language (lg), linguistics (lx) and sociolinguistics (soclx) will be used throughout the term.

Course objectives
• To explore some of the basic principles and theories of how language reflects, constructs, and is constructed by its users, and to what purpose.
• To examine attitudes towards language variation, and dispel myths about language quality, standards, and correctness.
• To acquire the technical vocabulary and expertise necessary to discuss language variation precisely.
• To study and practice the methods used in sociolinguistic fieldwork, in order to undertake a systematic approach the study of language in society.
• To reflect on our own language use and attitudes, so that we might use language with greater awareness of its effect.

Student Objectives
What do you hope to accomplish in this class?
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Texts
Other readings may be placed on reserve in the Van Pelt Library.
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Course Requirements

- Exam #1 (on 12/21/99) 20%
- Exam #2 (on 1/25/00) 20%
- Prospectuses (prelim. due 1/11, revision due 1/18) plus group meeting with VB, Week 5 5%
- Oral presentation (Wks 8-10) 15%
- Final research paper (due Monday, 2/21/99) 20%
- Participation 20%

5% short written essays/ quizzes & discussion (10%)
10% Attendance (10%; -.5 for each unexc. absence)

Total 100%

Plagiarism

To take the work of others and pass it off as your own is academic theft. Using others' work without proper attribution will result in your failing the assignment, or the class, depending on the scope. However, it is no contradiction that linguists often do their best work in consultation with others; in fact, we must observe how people use language in order to gather our data. You are encouraged to work with others as you prepare assignments for class, and in the final presentation and paper, but all exams and quizzes must be your own work. Furthermore, you must contribute your fair share to any group work. Please see me if you have difficulties in understanding where the line lies between consultation and/or quotation vs. plagiarism.

NOTE: MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (3310).

Explanation of Course Requirements

This class is largely based on discussion of materials raised in the readings and in lectures. Therefore, your grade for class participation is based on the assumption that regular attendance is absolutely critical for keeping up. You will be held responsible for all additions or changes to the syllabus, or handouts, should you miss class. Note that we may plan a trip to the library archives; stay tuned for timing on that.

You learn linguistics by doing it; thus, class participation is vital. If you miss class, you deprive yourself of important practice and information, as well as depriving the class of your viewpoint and ideas. Missing 5 class periods will zero out your FULL participation grade. Be sure to inform me of any legitimately excusable absences (e.g., plant trips, registration) as well as any illnesses, in writing, beforehand if possible.

We will use short written essays as springboards for discussion: they will be based on your readings or an observation. I may also use brief quizzes to check whether you are keeping up with the readings. You will turn these in on time, and they will be assessed as Excellent (+), Satisfactory (v) or Unsatisfactory (-), or missing (0).

The two exams will be tests of your ability to understand and apply the vocabulary and basic principles covered in the readings and class lectures and discussions. They will include a mixture of objective, short answer, and essay questions.

Early in the term, you will divide into research groups to choose a topic for your final research panel presentation and paper. I will allow some time in class to meet with your group to choose a particular topic, but you will need to meet together outside of class. On 1/11, your group will turn in a BRIEF preliminary prospectus outlining your topic and methodological approach, to be written up formally, revised and resubmitted on 1/18, following the conference between your group and me during week 5.

The presentation and final paper will come out of your in-depth study of local dialect issues, undertaken in a group format. Your research must contain original data collected in an approved manner. You will work in a panels of 3-6 people and write collective or collaborative papers.

Your group's oral presentation, given in class in the last three weeks of the quarter, should take approximately 5-7 minutes per person within the group, plus some minutes for questions. This oral presentation may act as a rough draft for your final paper, but do not read your paper to the class!

The final paper should be carefully researched (citing all sources appropriately), and well argued. All bibliographic items should be cited according the standards of the APA or MLA. The paper is due on Monday of finals week (2/21). More details about this final paper will follow.
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Schedule of Course Assignments

NOTE: You are expected to come to class having read the appropriate assignment; you should be prepared to raise any questions or difficulties you might have had arising from the readings.

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<tr>
<th>Wk. Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>11/30</td>
<td>Asst. #1 due: “Getting to know you”. Myths about language. Standards, dialects, vernaculars; language as a living organism. Reading due: B&amp;T: Myths 20, 1, 17, 9, 15, 2</td>
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<td>12/7</td>
<td>Dialects: What are they, why do they exist, how do we study them? Asst. #2 in class Reading due: W&amp;S-E: Chaps 1-3</td>
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<td>12/14</td>
<td>Regional accents of the U.S.: Past, present, future. Discuss movie; Asst. #3 due. Reading due: W&amp;S-E: Chaps 4-5 B&amp;T: Myths 21, 3, 8, 5</td>
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<td>12/16</td>
<td>Collecting linguistic data; research methodologies. Ethical considerations: Human Subjects review, etc. Brainstorm project topics, REVIEW</td>
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<td>12/21</td>
<td>EXAM #1 WINTER BREAK. TRAVEL SAFELY &amp; WATCH YOUR LANG!</td>
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<td>1/11</td>
<td>GROUP MEETINGS ALL WEEK W/VB</td>
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<td>1/13</td>
<td>Social and ethnic variation: Ebonies/African American Vernacular English Asst. #4 in class PRELIMINARY GROUP PROSPECTUS DUE Reading due: W&amp;S-E: Chap. 6, B&amp;T: Myths 13, 14, 12, 10, 19,</td>
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<td>1/18</td>
<td>Gender &amp; Language variation: deficit, dominance, difference, diversity (the continuum of gendered experience) Reading due: W&amp;S-E: Chap. 7 Reserve: Bing &amp; Bergval1 “The question of questions: Beyond binary thinking”</td>
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<td>1/18</td>
<td>Dialects &amp; Style Asst. #5 (observation) due REVISED GROUP PROSPECTUS DUE. Reading due: W&amp;S-E: Chap. 8</td>
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<td>1/19</td>
<td>Applications &amp; Awareness Analyzing &amp; interpreting sociolinguistic data REVIEW Reading due: W&amp;S-E: Chaps. 10, 11</td>
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<td>1/25</td>
<td>EXAM #2</td>
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<td>1/27</td>
<td>Advice on presenting linguistic research: oral, written, and graphic formats for presentations and papers.</td>
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<td>ORAL PRESENTATIONS</td>
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<td>WINTER CARNIVAL; NO CLASS</td>
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<td>2/21</td>
<td>(Monday) FINAL PAPERS DUE by 3 PM</td>
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