Course description

Language plays a central role in representation; understanding its structure and use brings insight into how we shape the symbolic worlds to our ends. This term, we will begin by examining a variety of theories about language and its proper study, and consider different theorists' reasons for insisting on focusing on form vs. function as the centrally important object of linguistic study—whether language is essentially cognitive or communicative. We then take up the study of language in three modalities: oral, written, and electronic. We begin by examining the significations and variabilities of spoken language forms (dialects and their social valuations, the Ebonics controversy, gender variation, the best methods of oral data collection). We move then to contrast orality to the power of the written form, including approaches to literacy, and the Critical Discourse Analysis of the control of language by elites. We then will compare these two long-standing modalities with the new genres of language coalescing in electronic media, considering issue such issues as structure, coherence, anonymity, and performativity, considering how electronic genres vary, yet depend heavily upon pre-existing habits from the oral and written domains. We will do short exercises analyzing each modality.

Students will be expected to begin or continue an extended project in which they collect and analyze oral, written, and/or electronic texts. We will study how to collect texts, attending to important ethical considerations. With texts in hand, we will evaluate the differing structural properties of oral, written, and electronic formats and how those structural properties affect meaning. The levels of analysis may range from individual lexical items (e.g., word choice, use of discourse particles like 'okay'), to sentential choices (active vs. passive voice, use of questions), to conversational strategies (turn-taking behaviors, indirect speech acts, politeness, directives), to choices of genre and beyond. We will also examine such issues as the production and reproduction of power in conversations and texts with respect to such issues as gender, race or ethnicity, and class; power in the classroom; power in institutional settings; etc.

This course may be useful to those who already have data and who are looking for analytical tools; it can also foster projects that may produce new data and theoretical perspectives suitable for conference papers, publications, masters' projects, theses or dissertations. The potential application is large: one can usefully apply linguistic analytic methods to conversation analysis, text linguistics, ethnographic research, written discourse conventions, social construction, professional discourse, language instruction, grammar, literacy, analysis of writing and reading, rhetorical tropes, technical communication, and stylistics.
Course requirements
Reading responses (synopses of, reactions to, and questions arising from each reading)
Short assignments: collection, arrangement, and analysis of oral, written, and electronic texts, ): assigned around Weeks 5, 8, 11
Leading class discussion/outside readings (one time during term; choose to complement final project)
Research prospectus (due around 5th week); meet to discuss with Vicky
Progress report (to class) on research (about 10th week)
Oral presentation on research (Weeks 14-15)
Final research paper (about 15-25 pages, due Finals Week)

Texts

Plus articles placed on reserve in the graduate files in the gray 2-drawer filing cabinet in the 3rd floor north alcove.

Readings fifth week and after will be determined by students' interests; we will tailor the readings to be most useful to students’ projects.

ADA 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 (x7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (x7-3310).

Course Schedule
Wk  Day  Date  Topic

   Th  1/17 Some theories of language: Saussure (6-23, 65-78), Bakhtin (SG 60-102; DI 260-296), Chomsky (3-27)


2 T 1/22 More theories of language: Bourdieu, Halliday, Pinker


“General Introduction,” pp. 32-34


Th 1/24 Theories of discourse: Johnstone DA Chap. 1 & 2, Schiffrin Chap. 2, Foucault, van Dijk


3 T 1/29 Theories of sociolinguistics: Labov, Hymes, Gumperz, Cameron


**Th 1/31** Methods: Johnstone QM Chaps 1-4; writing a human-subjects request and a consent form

**4 T 2/5** Methods: Johnstone QM Chaps. 5-8: On data and its collection


**Th 2/7** WINTER CARNIVAL: NO CLASS

**5 T 2/12** Labov: Martha’s Vineyard, Dept. store, Lower East Side; methods again.  
**Oral language: collection, transcription, analysis**

**Th 2/14** On class (Labov, Trudgill, Bernstein, Eckert...)

**Research prospectuses/appointments to discuss them with Vicky**

**6 T 2/19** On geography: dialects, video: *American Tongues* +

**Th 2/21** Dialectology (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, Chambers, Kurath, Remlinger, Bergvall)

**7 T 2/26** On race: AAVE: Labov, Smitherman, Baugh, ...

**Th 2/28** On gender: Bergvall 1999...

**SPRING BREAK**

**8 T 3/12** Conversational analysis; interruptions
Th 3/14 Oral/Written continuum: comparisons: Chafe & Danielewicz, Tannen
Written texts: collection, analysis

9 T 3/19 Oral/Written: access to education: Bourdieu and Passeron, Cazden, Mehan, ...
Th 3/21 On “Standard Language”; Verbal Hygiene (Cameron);
Critical Discourse analysis: power of the elites

10 T 3/26 Units of Analysis (Johnstone DA Chaps 3-7)
Research progress report; update class

Th 3/28 Other units of analysis

11 T 4/2 Doing electronic texts (lab work): analyzing structure
Electronic texts: collection, analysis

Th 4/4 Electronic texts: cohesion (Herring)

12 T 4/9 Electronic texts: anonymity, performativity, gender
Th 4/11 (Vicky away)

13 T 4/16 (Vicky away)
Th 4/18 (Vicky away) (back Friday; appointments to consult)

14 T 4/23 Oral presentations

Th 4/25 Oral presentations

15 T 4/30 Oral presentations

Th 5/2 Oral presentation / Evaluations

FIN T 5/7 FINAL PAPERS DUE
Course Bibliography, alphabetical (in process)


