Course Description

Language has long 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 present and future. A central issue this semester is language and identity. 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.

Students will work, alone or 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 data on groups of language users or and "communities of practice"; or 3) examining language and/or attitudes about language.

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: My abbreviations for language (lg), linguistics (lx) and sociolinguistics (soks) may be used throughout the term.

Texts


Other readings may be sent by e-mail or be accessible via my webpage (password protected).

Some relevant websites

www.pbs.org/speak <site for PBS program Do You Speak American? > [PBS]
http://www.fhs.harvard.edu/~rodder/dialect/ <site of US dialect survey>

Course objectives

- To explore some of the basic principles and theories of how language reflects, constrains, 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.

Course Requirements

- Participation 20%
  - Attendance & active engagement in class discussion (5%)
  - Participation in group research project (5%)
  - Weekly reading/discussion responses (10%)
- Exam #1 (2/20/06) 15%
- Exam #2 (3/6/06) 15%
- Exam #3 (3/28/06) 15%
- Prospectsues (prelim. due 2/14; revision due 3/14) 5%
  plus conferences with VB, Week 6
- Oral presentation & draft due (Wks 12-14) 10%
- Final research paper (due 4/20, except last group) 20%
Total 100%

Explanation of Course Requirements

Attendance & Active Engagement

Regular attendance and preparation are the only ways to keep up with the pace of ideas and information exchange in this class. We will frequently discuss material in class that is NOT covered in the books or put on reserve or e-mail. It is also YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to read the material before class and to come prepared to discuss it, and to arrange for someone to pick up any handouts or lend you notes if you miss class.

You learn linguistics by doing it; thus, active engagement in class participation is very important. If you miss class, you deprive yourself of important practice and information, as well as depriving the class of your viewpoint and ideas. Each unexcused class absence after the first two subtracts 1 point from your Attendance grade. However, missing more than five class periods zeroes out 10% of your participation grade. Be sure to notify me in writing of any legitimately excusable absences—in advance, if possible. If you are truly ill (e.g., with the flu), don’t come to class. Let me know by e-mail ASAP; and keep up on assignments as much as possible. I will require doctor’s proof for any extended absences to be excused. We will cope with bad-weather days as they happen.
Weekly Reading Responses
Come to class having read the assignment listed for that day! It is critical to keep up with the readings assigned so that you are able to intelligently discuss the questions we consider. To prepare for class, you will do weekly reading responses (typed, 1-2 pp.), to help get you thinking about issues for discussion. We will use these as springboards for discussion: they will be based on your readings or on an observation. You will turn these in on time, and they will be assessed as Excellent (+), Satisfactory (0), or Unsatisfactory (-), or missing (0); late assignments may receive half or no credit, depending on my discretion.

Examinations
The three essay examinations during the semester will cover the material up to that point in class and in the texts. It is absolutely critical to read the texts. We cannot cover all material in the class, and I will assume that you will be familiar with the general issues and approaches raised by the authors. All examinations must be your own work. The exams will be tests of your ability to understand, apply, and extend the vocabulary and basic principles covered in the readings and class lectures and discussions.

Research Project
Early in the term, you will choose a topic for your final research panel presentation and paper, which may be done alone or in groups. I will allow some time in class to meet with your group to choose a particular topic, but you will probably need to meet together outside of class. On 2/15, you will turn in a BRIEF preliminary prospectus outlining your topic and methodological approach, to be discussed with me in conference during Week 6. Then, you will revise and extend the paragraph, submitting it with an annotated bibliography and outline of research method, on 3/14.

The presentation and final paper will come out of your in-depth study of sociolinguistic issues. Your research must contain data collected in an approved manner.

The oral presentation will be given in class in weeks 11-14 of the semester, and should take approximately 7-10 minutes of presentation, plus 2-5 minutes for questions. You MUST use audio-visual supports for your presentation, and give copies of relevant linguistic data either on overheads or handouts. On the day of the presentation, you will turn in to me copies of all overheads/data, and a first draft of the paper. (However, you must not simply read your paper to the class; talk to us, not to the paper.)

The final paper should be carefully researched (citing all sources appropriately), exemplified with linguistic data, and well argued. All bibliographic items should be cited according to the standards of the APA or MLA. The final paper (which must be submitted in a portfolio with your original and revised prospectus, and first draft) is due on the last day of class. More information about this final paper will follow.

NOTE: Keep ALL material written this semester in a portfolio. I may require ALL writing to be turned in at the end of the semester.

Academic Integrity
True learning demands careful attention to words and ideas, our own and others. We must give others' ideas thoughtful consideration if we desire it for ourselves. Likewise, we must respect the rights and responsibilities of intellectual property. Taking someone else's thoughts or words and passing them 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 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.

Here are two useful websites to consult:
1) Sharon Wilson's page defining (and avoiding) plagiarism: http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/writing/AvoidingPlagiarism.html
2) The University’s Academic Integrity Policy: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/dos/academicint.htm

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

Schedule of Course Events (subject to change depending on class needs)
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<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/10 Introduction: overview, requirements, language influences</td>
<td>1/12 What’s language got to do with you! Dialect maps of the US, the Midwest Reading: W&amp;B xxiii-xxxvi, M&amp;C 1-8 DUE: Personal statement of lg influences</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1/17 Language as argument Reading: W&amp;B 1-64</td>
<td>1/19 video: <em>American Tongues</em> DUE: Discussing language variation &amp; attitude</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1/31 <em>Local dialect issues</em>: guest Laura Walikainen Reading: M&amp;C 31-48, 49-66, 67-68 browse ahead to look for topics</td>
<td>2/2 Exam #1</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2/7 Doing linguistic research: observation issues and ethics; brainstorming topics Group work on defining linguistic issues to observe</td>
<td>2/9 Winter Carnival - No Class</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2/14 A multilingual US: Spanish Reading: M&amp;C 89-114, W&amp;B 179-235 RESEARCH CONFERENCES Preliminary RESEARCH PROSPECTUS DUE</td>
<td>2/16 Presentation of Observational Research RESEARCH CONFERENCES</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>2/28 Language and Gender Reading: W&amp;B 333-392</td>
<td>3/2 Exam #2</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>3/7 Spring Break - No Class</td>
<td>3/9 Spring Break - No Class</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>3/28 Exam #3</td>
<td>3/31 <em>STUDENT TALKS?</em> (drafts due same day)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td><em>STUDENT TALKS</em></td>
<td>4/6 <em>STUDENT TALKS</em></td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>4/13 <em>STUDENT TALKS</em></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>4/18 <em>STUDENT TALKS</em></td>
<td>4/20 Summary, Evaluations; Final papers due</td>
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