HU3910 Global Language Issues  
Spring 2009

Syllabus

Professor: Victoria Bergvall  
Classroom: 15-127
Office: Walker 327  
Class time: TR 12:35-1:50
Phone: 487-3243  
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E-mail: vbergval@mtu.edu  
and by appointment

www.hu.mtu.edu/~vbergval

Course Description

The world harbors an amazing diversity of languages, estimated at nearly 7,000 in number. Yet roughly a third of the world’s population speaks or has routine contact with one language: English. It has become a lingua franca, the de facto “global language”—to the benefit of its native speakers and perhaps detriment of other languages’ speakers. But this “English” is not simply one homogeneous object; it is more accurate to speak of “World Englishes.” And English is not inevitably the dominant language; it is has a complex history and an uncertain future (if judged against the rise and fall of other dominant languages, e.g., Latin).

This course investigates the history of the English language, and its many variations: how English arrived at its present state: what its roots are, how—within the last half century—it came to hold such a dominant position, and what this means for the future of thousands of other languages.

Just as this course is about the vitality and variation of English, it also considers the mortality of other languages that are facing rapid decline. We will consider what factors support or threaten a language and its speakers, and what is lost when the world’s linguistic “biodiversity” shrinks.

Each one of us will play some part in the future of languages, not only English, but others as well, so we must become better informed about our choices and their consequences.

Required Texts


Course Objectives

• To understand how English (and its current variants) developed, and how it has come to hold its present pre-eminent position in the world.
• To learn about other languages in the world, to consider whether they are “safe” or “endangered” and why this matters so much.
• To understand the social and material factors that influence the rise and fall of world languages and their civilizations.
• To become better-informed citizens with respect to linguistic questions and their consequences.

Course Requirements

• Participation 10%
  - Attendance/Active engagement
  - Reading responses/quizzes, as necessary
• Exam #1 (2/12/09) 20%
• Exam #2 (4/7/09) 20%
• “Majority Report” on a dominant Ig (Wks 2-7) 10%
• “Minority Report” on an endangered Ig (Wks 9-11) 10%
• Final Project 30%
  - Conference w/ VB (Week 7) 2%
  - Preliminary prospectus (due 3/5/09) 1%
  - Revised prospectus (due 3/26/09) 2%
  - Oral presentation & draft (Weeks 12-14) 10%
  - Portfolio w/ Final Draft of paper (by 4/24) 15%
TOTAL 100%
Grading System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade points/credit</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92% &amp; above</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>87% - 91.9%</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>Very good</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82% - 86.9%</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>77% - 81.9%</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>Above average</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>72% - 76.9%</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>Average</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>67% - 71.9%</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>Below average</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60% - 66.9%</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Inferior</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59.9% and below</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>Failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Incomplete; given only when a student is unable to complete a segment of the course because of circumstances beyond the student's control. A grade of incomplete may be given only when approved in writing by the Dept. Chair.</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Conditional, no grade points per credit; given only when the student is at fault in failing to complete a minor segment of a course, but in the judgment of the instructor does not need to repeat the course. It must be made up within the next semester in residence or the grade becomes a failure (F). A (X) grade is computed into the grade point average as an (F) grade.</td>
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Participation

Attendance Policy

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; I cannot give "make up" lectures.

You learn linguistics by doing it; thus, active engagement in class participation is very important. If you miss class, you deprive yourself of important involvement and information, as well as depriving the class of your viewpoint and ideas. Each unexcused class absence after the second counts -1 point.

However, missing more than five class periods zeroes out the 10% of your participation grade. Be sure to notify me in writing of any legitimately excusable absences--in advance, if possible.

Reading Responses and Essays

Come to class with the assignment listed for that day read! It is critical to keep up with the readings assigned so that you are able to intelligently discuss the questions we consider. If you are not keeping up with reading, I will require weekly reading responses or give short reading quizzes.

Majority and Minority Language Reports

The goal of these reports is to have you actively participating in the research and presentation of information and perspectives to the class, discussing the situation of other dominant and endangered languages. Through these 7-15 min. class reports, students will come to see how the languages people speak are contextualized within a matrix of social and material forces. These are due Weeks 2-7 (Majority Report) and Weeks 9-11 (Minority Report).

Examinations

The essay examinations during the semester 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.

Final Project

The final project is a series of steps towards the preparation of a ten-page paper dealing with some issue or debate in the content areas covered in the class. After some discussion of possible topics and group memberships, students will have some time in class to explore resources and/or work with group members. During Week 7, students will meet with me in Conferences, in groups or individually, to work through ideas and resources for the paper, resulting in a Preliminary Prospectus (due 3/26). This stage culminates in an extended paragraph (per person or group), outlining the research area with definite research questions and naming resources consulted (Revised Prospectus due 3/26).

On the day of the Oral Presentation (Weeks 12-14) each person will speak for about 15 minutes. Due on that day is a Preliminary Draft of the final paper, including full citations and references, as well as a copy of any powerpoint slides, overheads or materials used for the oral presentation. I will make extended comments on the oral presentations and drafts, and you will be expected to take this into account in preparing a revised Final Paper (approximately 10 pages apiece) for submission at the end of class (by Friday, 4/24).

You will submit the Final Paper in a Portfolio along with all previous project work (Preliminary Prospectus; Revised Prospectus and Outline; Oral Presentation notes, overheads, and Preliminary Draft). To receive full credit for the last 15% of the grade, there must be clear evidence of significant revisions to the preliminary draft, unless the first draft was an A+!

It is critical that you keep copies of all stages of work to submit in your final portfolio: if you work in a group, you need to keep a separate copy for your own portfolio. I will give more details on this process and the project later in the semester.
Other Important Course Policies

Academic Integrity
Linguists often do their best work in consultation with others; in fact, we must observe how people talk in order to gather our data. But data are not solutions. Taking the work of others and passing it off as your own is academic theft and will be punishable by failing the assignment/course or dismissal from school. Cases of plagiarism will be turned over to the Dean of Students' Office. See details about Michigan Tech’s Academic Integrity definitions, policies, and enforcement procedures at [http://www.sa.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/airc/](http://www.sa.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/airc/) and [http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html](http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html).

You may consult with others as you work on take-home problem sets, but you will hurt yourself if you simply copy others’ answers. All exams must be done on your own.

You may also consult with others on your research papers, but you must document all sources used and you must write up the final form of the paper yourself (or clearly document your contributions to a group project).

We will discuss the proper practice of research and citation during the term. See me or visit the Writing Center ([http://www.hu.mtu.edu/wcl](http://www.hu.mtu.edu/wcl)) if you have any questions about appropriate research processes or writing concerns.

Accommodation for Disabilities
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 see the Dean of Students (x7-2212) as soon as possible. See the student handbook regarding Disability Services: [http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability](http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability).

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

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Programs
Michigan Tech strives to offer equal opportunity to all of its employees, students, applicants for employment, and applicants for admission without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, height, weight, marital status, disabled veteran status, veteran status, arrest record, or disability. See [http://www.admin.mtu.edu/admin/hoc/policy/ch3/ch3g7.htm](http://www.admin.mtu.edu/admin/hoc/policy/ch3/ch3g7.htm).

The Affirmative Programs Office (commonly called the Affirmative Action Office, or AAO) facilitates Michigan Tech's development of an environment that is free from prejudicial discrimination or harassment and that is conducive to learning and individual growth for all campus members and visitors.

Contact the Affirmative Programs Office, Room 207, Administration Building, Phone: 906-487-3310, Fax: 906-487-2842; E-mail Sherry Kauppi, Director, for more information.

Electronics in the classroom
I appreciate your full attention in class; you need to be present (not just physically, but also mentally), prepared, and ready to participate in class. Thus, ELECTRONIC DEVICES such as laptops, cell phones, Blackberries, iPods, PDAs, etc. MUST BE TURNED OFF in the classroom (unless there is a compelling need and arrangements are made in advance with the professor).

If you are expecting an important phone call and need to keep your cell phone on, let me know in advance. The phone should be set on vibrate; take the call outside the classroom.

Any information exchanges on these devices during exams are also prohibited and violate the Academic Integrity Code of Michigan Tech.

Schedule of Course Assignments
The following schedule presents my best estimate of the progress through the class; it may be subject to change to meet class needs.
Notes: The abbreviations l.g. = “language” and l.x. = “linguistics.”
Readings are listed by the name of the author.
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<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/13 Introduction: the rise of English &amp; decline of other Igs; timelines; overview of basic linguistic structures</td>
<td>1/15 What it takes to be a world language. Where have all the Igs gone? World of many (fewer) Igs. Reading: Ostler: Preface, 1, 2: xix-25 Nettle &amp; Romaine (N&amp;R) 1: 1-25 Harrison Preface &amp;1: vii-21</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1/27 Old English; Norse to Norman video: The Mother Tongue Reading: Barber 5-6: 100-150</td>
<td>1/29 Middle English; (early) Career of English Reading: Barber 7: 151-173 Ostler 12: 456-476</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2/5 Early Modern English video: Muse of Fire Reading: Barber 8: 152-198</td>
<td>2/12 EXAM #1</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2/10 Scientific Age; Westward Ho Reading: Barber 9: 199-233 Ostler 12: 477-521</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>2/24 Discuss Projects; Other Empire Languages Conferences start</td>
<td>2/28 A World of Diversity. Lost words, lost worlds Reading: Nettle &amp; Romaine 23: 26-77</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>3/17 Video: The Linguists Minority Reports start</td>
<td>3/19 The Ecology of Ig; Biological &amp; Economic waves Reading: N&amp;R 4: 78-98; 5: 99-125; 6: 126-149</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>3/31 Worlds within words Reading: Harrison 7: 205-235</td>
<td>4/2 Why something should be done; Sustainable Futures; Reading: N&amp;R 7: 150-175, 8: 176-204.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>4/7 EXAM #2</td>
<td>4/9 On giving presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>4/14 Research Presentations</td>
<td>4/16 Research Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4/21 Research Presentations</td>
<td>4/23 Summary: So why should we care? Evaluations Final papers due Friday, 4/24</td>
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Other assignments not listed:
Weeks 2-7: "Majority reports": 10-15 min. presentations on the status of other “world” languages (see, e.g., Ostler, Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World and other research)
Weeks 9-11: “Minority reports”: 7-10 min. presentations on the status of other endangered languages (see, e.g., www.ethnologue.com and www.omniglot.com)