Course Description

English 633
Seminar in Rhetoric and Professional Writing: Language & Social Interaction
Spring 2019
Thurs 4:30-7:10, CRT 108
Patricia Mayes (mayes@uwm.edu)

Part theory, part methodology, this capstone seminar provides an introduction to the study of naturally occurring (spoken) language for students in English and other language arts fields, who are interested in how language is used in real time to convey meaning, primarily through the sequential structuring of utterances. We focus on Conversation Analysis (CA), which was developed by a group of sociologists at UCLA who were interested in what language use and other micro-level actions could reveal about social order. CA has had a robust development in sociology over the past 50 years and has also been adopted by researchers in many other language-related disciplines. During the first few weeks of the course, we’ll work to achieve a basic understanding of how CA researchers approach data and the kinds of questions they ask. Then, we will focus on how CA has been used to research interaction in various settings, including everyday conversation and institutional settings such as courtrooms and classrooms, as well as how doctors and patients talk. Context is obviously very important in differentiating and understanding these various types of discourse, and CA focuses attention on how context is built utterance-by-utterance, allowing us to examine the details of how participants interact with one another in the moment.

As we go through the course material, you will be applying the approaches in the readings to data samples. Although the CA tradition was developed to analyze “talk-in-interaction” (i.e., spoken discourse), some concepts can be applied in online or multimodal settings.

Possible Texts