English 764: Sociolinguistics  
Spring 2016  
W 4:30-7:10, CRT 108

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Course Description

English 764 is an introductory sociolinguistics course for graduate students. In the broadest sense, sociolinguists study the role of language in human society. Formal study began in the U.S. in the late 1950s, as linguists began realizing that variation in linguistic structure is not a random process, but is structured in ways that reflect social phenomena. Explaining these variations is a crucial step in understanding processes of language change and language itself. In those early days, the primary focus was thus on how the social could be useful in advancing linguistic theory. Today, theory, methods, and focus have changed greatly, and many sociolinguists now advocate the reverse relation, using linguistic facts to study the social. In fact, some of the recent seminal scholarship now refers to the discipline as “sociocultural linguistics” in order to identify more closely with the common interests of scholars in closely related fields that focus on the social and cultural aspects of human life such as linguistic anthropology. We will begin by studying some of the older foundational theories such as the sociology of language, but much of our time will be spent focusing on present-day approaches to sociocultural linguistics. Among the specific topics to be included are the relationship between languages and linguistic varieties; language ideology, prescriptivism, and the “standard” language myth; how and why linguistic variation occurs, including social factors such as social class, ethnicity, and gender; how linguistic variation enables people to create styles and identities; and the impact of all of these issues on public policy, especially as it relates to education and literacy.

Texts and Other Materials

- Required readings are on the course D2L site, and there are several books on regular reserve, two-hour loan.
- Optional readings and handouts will also be on D2L

Course Requirements

Note: Please don’t email assignments to me. There will be dropboxes on D2L for you to submit assignments electronically.

1. Reading and Class Participation

A significant part of this course is based on the readings and in-class discussions. Each week, I would like to compose a set of student-generated questions for class
discussion. To that end, you will need to post a question on the discussion board on the D2L site four times during the semester. The deadline for posting for each week is 10 am on Tuesday before we meet so that everyone will have time to read the posts before class on Wednesday. Please keep track of how many times you have posted. In general, your questions should pertain to theoretical or methodological points brought up in the readings, but if you are confused about what the author(s) means, feel free to bring up additional, more basic questions.

2. Discussion Leader

Each week a student will be responsible for collecting the questions from the discussion board and leading the discussion. You can also add your own questions, and if no one posts in a particular week, please come up with a few questions of your own questions. Since the schedule is pretty busy, three questions should be plenty!

3. Article Critique

Prepare a summary of a research article and discussion questions to present to the class. Your questions should be based on the points in the article as they relate to other readings and material covered in class. I will distribute a list of possible articles, but you can also choose your own if there is something you are particularly interested in. A week after your presentation and class discussion of the article, you will hand in a written critique, which should provide a concise summary of the article, including the research questions, methods, findings, and implications. Then using the theories and methods outlined in our readings in conjunction with class discussion, provide a critical evaluation of the main points in the article. Note that “critical” does not mean that you have to disagree with the author(s) conclusions, but it does mean that you should explain the points in the article and your analysis in terms of previous research and principles discussed in class.

4. Final Project Presentations

During the last week of class, everyone will have a chance to present their final projects (described below). Plan to do a 15-minute presentation and receive feedback that will be useful for your papers.

5. Final Project

The final project should be 17-20 (double-spaced) pages. You can choose between APA and MLA styles. As you might know, Purdue University maintains an online writing lab that has guides to these styles. It is updated often and is an excellent resource (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/). There are three options for the type of project.

Option 1 is a proposal for a sociolinguistic study, in which you will use one or more of the approaches for data gathering that we have studied. The proposal should
include an introduction; research questions; a detailed sketch of the participants and research methods to be used; a discussion of the significance and implications of your study (i.e., what you hope to find). If you plan to use a survey, interview, or other technique (e.g., matched guise) be sure to include a detailed plan and copies of the instruments to be used. In the case of participant observation, you should include detailed plan of action, including information about the community of practice, research site, and what type of and how much data will be collected.

**Option 2** is a paper involving the analysis of linguistic data. For this option, think of a research question(s) that concerns one the topics we have focused on and use one or more of the methods studied to address it. You may either collect data specifically for this project, or use data you already have access to. However, note that in the latter case, you will need to match the research questions with the methods used to collect the data. For example, if you are interested in how gender is enacted in the classroom, you would need to do participant-observation. Already collected survey or interview data would only tell you how participants think about gender reflectively, not how they actually behave in gendered ways. Your paper does not need to make a new “discovery”; the primary point is to discuss some of the theories and approaches that have come up in the readings and try to apply them to your own data. In other words, it doesn’t have to concern something that has never been written about before. It is enough to raise thoughtful questions about how the issues examined in the readings and class discussions might be applied to your data.

**Option 3** is a critical literature review in which you would do some further research and examination of the literature on a particular topic, beyond what we have done in class. You will also need to make sure that your topic is narrow enough that it can be written about within the limits of the paper. For that reason, it may be useful to think in terms of a research question (or questions), much as you would for options 1 and 2. For example, we’ll discuss language ideologies and standards, but this is a broad topic, which could be narrowed by defining the questions in terms of context: 1) How are standards (or “rules”) adopted in a particular context? 2) Are the standards applied to both written and spoken language? 3) Who makes these decisions? 4) What issues or problems arise and what are possible solutions? Try to find five additional sources. Critically analyze the arguments made; discuss any controversies; and come up with a conclusion based on your original question(s). Of course, in some cases, the conclusion might be more questions. Feel free to discuss the class readings in addition to your outside sources.

**Grading**

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UWM Policies

Information about UWM policies regarding students with disabilities, religious observances, students called to active duty military, incompletes, and other issues can be found at this link [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf)

There is also a link to the “credit hour policy” (expectations concerning time investment): [https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/faculty/2838_Credit_Hour_Policy.pdf](https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/faculty/2838_Credit_Hour_Policy.pdf)

**Tentative Schedule**

**Week 1 (1/22):** Introduction: What is sociolinguistics?

- Lippi-Green (2012), “Language ideology or science fiction” (Introduction); “The linguistic facts of life” (Ch. 1)
- Coupland and Jaworski (2009), “Social worlds through language” (C & J Ch. 1)

Recommended if you don’t have any linguistics background: Mesthie et al. (2009) “Clearing the ground: Basic issues concepts and approaches” (Ch. 1)

**Week 2 (1/29):** Language, Variety, and Code/Speech Community

- Wardhaugh (2010), “Languages, dialects, and varieties” (Ch. 2)
- Wardhaugh (2010), “Codes” (Ch. 4)
- Rampton (2009), “Speech community and beyond” (C & J Ch. 47)

Recommended: Bucholtz (1999), “‘Why be normal?’ Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls”

**Week 3 (2/5):** Language Ideologies and Attitudes

- Lippi-Green (2012), “The standard language myth” (Ch. 4)

Recommended: Johnson (2009), “Language ideology and spelling reform: Discourses of orthography in the debate over German” (C & J Ch. 27)

Article Presentation:

**Week 4 (2/12):** Language Variation and Change

- Lippi-Green (2012), “Language in motion” (Ch. 2)
- Mesthrie et al. (2009), “Social dialectology” (Ch. 3)
- Mesthrie et al (2009), “Language variation and change” (Ch. 4)
Recommended: Labov (2001), “The transmission problem in linguistic change” (C & J Ch. 5); Gordon (2007), “Techniques of analysis I: Phonological variation” (if you are interested in sound change)

Article Presentation:

Week 5 (2/19): Recent Theories and Approaches

- Bucholtz & Hall (2008), “All of the above: New coalitions in sociocultural linguistics”
- Woolard (2008), “Why dat now?: Linguistic-anthropological contributions to the explanation of sociolinguistic icons and change”

Recommended: Gumperz & Gumperz (2008), “Studying language, culture, and society: Sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology?”

Article Presentation:

Week 6 (2/26): Linguistic Variation and Social Class/Status

- Labov (1972), “The social stratification of (r) in New York City department stores” (C & J, Ch. 3)
- Eckert (2008), “Variation and the indexical field”


Article Presentation:

Week 7 (3/5): Sociolinguistic (Data Collection) Methods

- Milroy & Gordon (2003), “Locating and selecting subjects” (Ch. 2)
- Milroy & Gordon (2003), “Data collection” (Ch. 3)

Recommended: Milroy & Gordon (2003), “Language variation and the social world: Issues in analysis and interpretation” (Ch. 4)

Article Presentation:
Week 8 (3/12): Linguistic Variation and Ethnicity

- Fought (2006), “What Is ethnicity?” (Ch. 1)
- Fought (2006), “Language and the construction of ethnic identity” (Ch. 2)

Recommended: Mendoza-Denton (1999), “Sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology of US Latinos”

Article Presentation:

3/19 Spring Break

Week 9 (3/26): Language & Gender


Recommended: Speer (2011), “On the role of reported, third party compliments in passing as a ‘real’ woman”

Article Presentation:

Week 10 (4/2): AAVE/AAE

- Lippi-Green (2012), “The real trouble with Black language (Ch. 10)
- Morgan (2002), “Language norms and practices” (Ch. 3)
- Smitherman (2003), “White English in Blackface, or who do I be” (Ch. 3)

Article Presentation:

Week 11 (4/9): Styles and Identities

- Bucholtz (2011), “White styles: Language, race, and youth identities” (Ch. 1)
- Bucholtz (2011), “Pretty fly for a white guy: European American hip hop fans and African American English” (Ch. 6)
- Rampton (2009), “Crossing, ethnicity, and code-switching (C & J Ch. 20)

Recommended: Bell (1997), “Language style as audience design” (C & J, Ch. 18)

Article Presentation:
Week 12 (4/16): Sociolinguistics and Education

- Lippi-Green (2012), “The education system” (Ch. 6)
- Lippi-Green (2012), “Moral panic in Oakland (Ch. 16 – Case Study 1)


Article Presentation:

Week 13 (4/23): Sociolinguistics and Literacy

- Nichols and Colón (2000), “Spanish literacy and the academic success of high school students: Codeswitching as a classroom resource”
- Richardson (2008), “African American literacies”
- Blommaert et al. (2006), “On being declared illiterate: Language-ideological disqualification in Dutch classes for immigrants in Belgium”

Article Presentation:

Week 14 (4/30): Student presentations

Week 15 (5/7): Student presentations

Final papers are due May 14 by 11:59 pm in the dropbox.

Material on Regular Reserve