



University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

LIN 199 (SEM-A)

Babel Forever!: How Language Differences Arise (and Why New Ones Keep Arising)

Registration #20726

UB Seminar - 3 credits

Fall 2018

COURSE INFORMATION

Date(s)/Time(s): MWF 12:00–12:50 p.m.

Location: Capen 110

3 credits

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Office hours: Monday 1:30–2:30 p.m. & Friday 10:30–11:30 a.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The threats posed by globalization and modernization to the world's linguistic and cultural diversity are a popular topic of public and academic discussion. This seminar contrasts the effects of these homogenizing forces with the persistent emergence of new diversity. We will investigate language divergence at two levels. What we might call "microdiversification" concerns innovations in the speech of individuals and small groups – new words, usages, and pronunciations that set them apart from the people around them. Here, we will look especially at linguistic work on the rise of new slang and other aspects of youth language. At a more "macro" level, we will investigate the societal and ideological forces that cause languages to split in two and the circumstances under which entirely new languages, including creoles and sign languages, emerge. A number of special topics – including trade pidgins, language-like whistling and drumming, and invented languages such as Esperanto, Klingon and Quenya – provide additional perspectives on communicative inventiveness and on our often conflicted attitudes toward diversity and uniformity.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and class participation. Discussion and other in-class activities are a major part of any seminar. Students must be in class regularly in order to participate. Students may participate differently depending on their personality and background, but all students are expected to be attentive and well-prepared.

Reading responses. Students will submit three responses of about one page each through the e-portfolio. These should reflect what you have found most interesting in that week's reading as well as questions about anything you have not understood. (There will also be one or two optional response assignments later in the semester for interested students.)

Time-use journals. Students will keep and submit a detailed journal of their activities for one week.

Lecture notes. After discussing note-taking strategies, students will submit their notes from one lecture.

Reflections. This three-page essay should look back over the semester and discuss what you have gotten out of the seminar as well as concepts and ideas you might have struggled with and criticisms you might have. Thoughtfulness, honesty, and specificity are key characteristics of a strong reflections essay. One page of the essay should be devoted to the ethical issues discussed in class, including academic and scientific integrity.

Final projects. The final project can be based on additional reading and/or on collection of some original data. The project will be completed in a number of stages, with students receiving feedback at each stage: (1) topic idea (informal); (2) one-paragraph proposal; (3) annotated bibliography; (4) presentations; (5) outline (1 page) and report (3 pages).

Presentations. All students will present their final projects to the class during the last two weeks of the semester. We will discuss ways to prepare for and deliver an effective presentation.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Having completed a UB Seminar, students will be able to:

Course Learning Outcome	Maps to the Following Program Outcomes / Competencies:	Delivered through the Following Instructional Method(s):	Student Achievement Assessed with the Following Method(s)/Assignments:
1. Think critically using multiple modes of inquiry.	UBGE, SUNY Critical Thinking, MSCHE Critical Analysis and Reasoning	Assigned reading; class discussion and debate; written assignments	monitoring of participation; graded reading responses
2. Analyze disciplinary content to identify contexts, learn fresh perspectives, and debate and discuss problems in the field.	UBGE, SUNY Information Literacy	Selected readings; in-class and online discussion; peer critique of drafts	monitoring of participation; graded written assignments; final project
3. Understand and apply the methods of close reading, note taking, analysis, and synthesis.	UBGE, SUNY Critical Thinking, MSCHE Critical Analysis and Reasoning	Required readings; modeling and discussion of note-taking techniques; questions and comments posted to e-portfolio	review of student notes; final project
4. Recognize and debate ethical issues and academic integrity in a variety of settings.	UBGE, MSCHE Values, Ethics, & Diverse Perspectives	Class discussion; written assignment	monitoring of class discussion; ethics portion of reflection paper
5. Demonstrate proficiency in oral discourse and written communication.	UBGE, SUNY Basic Communication, MSCHE Oral and Written Communication	class discussion; student presentations; written assignments	monitoring of class discussion; feedback on presentations and assignments
6. Develop essential research and study skills such as time management.	UBGE, SUNY Information Literacy	class discussion of time management and study skills; guided step-by-step work on projects	presentations and final projects; time-use journal with 2nd reading response
7. Utilize the eportfolio for at least one assignment.	UBGE, SUNY Information Literacy, MSCHE Technological Competency	written assignments	assignments submitted through e-portfolio
8. Understand the academic expectations pertaining to studentship at the University at Buffalo and to higher learning at a research university.	UBGE	class discussion; one-on-one meetings	attendance; monitoring of class discussion

Note: *This course meets or contributes to meeting the SUNY General Education Requirements (GER) for Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, and Basic Communication: ([SUNY website](#)), as well as areas of general education required by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

GRADING POLICY

Learning assessments will be weighted according to the following break-down.

Weighting	Assessment / Assignment
25%	Class participation
30%	Assignments: three reading responses, one reflections essay, lecture notes, time-use journals
25%	Final project
20%	Presentations
100%	TOTAL

Final Grades:

Grade	Quality Points	Percentage
A	4.0	93.0% -100.00%
A-	3.67	90.0% - 92.9%
B+	3.33	87.0% - 89.9%
B	3.00	83.0% - 86.9%
B-	2.67	80.0% - 82.9%
C+	2.33	77.0% - 79.9%
C	2.00	73.0% - 76.9%
C-	1.67	70.0% - 72.9%
D+	1.33	67.0% - 69.9%
D	1.00	60.0% - 66.9%
F	0	59.9 or below

Consult the Undergraduate Catalog for the [Explanation of Grades](#).

Incompletes will be granted only in exceptional cases (such as medical emergencies). Before raising the possibility of an incomplete, please familiarize yourself with UB's official policy at:

<https://catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/explanation.html>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is a fundamental university value. Through the honest completion of academic work, students sustain the integrity of the university while facilitating the university's imperative for the transmission of knowledge and culture based upon the generation of new and innovative ideas.

All students should be sure that they understand the University's Academic Integrity policy before completing any assignments or taking any tests. If you have any questions or concerns about the policy, please discuss them with your instructor. You will find the policy at:

<https://catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/integrity.html>

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

If you require classroom or testing accommodations due to a disability, please contact Accessibility Resources, located at 60 Capen Hall. AR can be reached by phone at (716) 645-2608 or by email using the form at the website below. Please inform your instructor as soon as possible about your needs so that we can coordinate your accommodations.

<http://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/who-we-are/departments/accessibility.html>

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance in the class is mandatory. Missing more than three hours of class will result in a penalty to your final grade unless you are absent for religious reasons or due to a university-sanctioned event, in which case you should inform the instructor in advance to avoid penalty.

<https://catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/attendance.html>

The latest information on cancellations/delays due to weather or other unforeseen events can be found on the UB Alert page at: <http://emergency.buffalo.edu/>

COURSE SCHEDULE.

Week	Date	Topic	Required Readings / activities	Assignment due
1	Aug. 27	Introduction		
	Aug. 29		McWhorter: Introduction	
	Aug. 31			
2	Sep. 3	Labor Day	(no class)	
	Sep. 5	Dynamism	McWhorter: Chapter 1	Response 1
	Sep. 7			
3	Sep. 10	Macrodiversification	McWhorter: Chapter 2	
	Sep. 12			
	Sep. 14	Contact and mixture	McWhorter: Chapter 3	
4	Sep. 17			Time use journals
	Sep. 19	Emergence of pidgins and creoles	McWhorter: Chapter 4	
	Sep. 21			
5	Sep. 24	Growth of complexity	McWhorter: Chapter 5	Response 2
	Sep. 26			
	Sep. 28	Literacy, standardization, etc.	McWhorter: Chapter 6	
6	Oct. 1			Project ideas
	Oct. 3	Language loss	McWhorter: Chapter 7	
	Oct. 5			
7	Oct. 8	Invented languages	Okrent 2010	Lecture notes
	Oct. 10			
	Oct. 12			
8	Oct. 15	Language and adolescence	Eckert 2003	Project proposals
	Oct. 17			
	Oct. 19			
9	Oct. 22	Innovation and youth	Tagliamonte 2005	Response 3
	Oct. 24			
	Oct. 26			
10	Oct. 29	Language and (recent) technology	Grieve 2016	
	Oct. 31			
	Nov. 2			
11	Nov. 5	Emergence of new sign languages	Sandler et al. 2014	Bibliographies
	Nov. 7			
	Nov. 9			
12	Nov. 12	Whistling and drumming	Whistles in the Mist (online video)	
	Nov. 14			
	Nov. 16			
13	Nov. 19	Wrap-up and reflections		
	Nov. 21-23	Thanksgiving	(no class)	
14	Nov. 26	Student presentations		Presentations
	Nov. 28	Student presentations		
	Nov. 30	Student presentations		
15	Dec. 3	Student presentations		Reflections
	Dec. 5	Student presentations		
	Dec. 7	Student presentations		Final projects

COURSE MATERIALS

- John H. McWhorter. 2001. *The Power of Babel*. New York: Holt.
- Other readings and resources will be posted on the [UBlearns Blackboard](#) site.