

Course: LIN 315 Language in its social setting
Semester: Fall 2009
Instructor: Jürgen Bohnemeyer
Text: Bonvillain ⁵2007

This course in a nutshell: This course offers a first introduction to the study of language in its social and cultural context, with an emphasis on sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (especially the ethnography of speaking).

What this course is about, in much more detail: How does who we are and who those we talk to are affect how we speak? For example, how does it affect what language or dialect we use to talk to them, how formally or informally we speak, how we address the interlocutor, and what we do to “gain the floor” and hold or cede it during the conversation? Conversely, how does our use of language, not merely reflect, but help define who we are, in terms of class, gender, race, age, and so on, at least in the perception of others? There are four fields within linguistics and the neighboring disciplines that study these questions: **pragmatics, conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology.**

Pragmatics is the study of *utterance meaning*. It aims to construct theories that account for all those aspects of the meanings of linguistic utterances that depend, not solely on the words and syntactic constructions they involve, but on the context in which they occur. Although pragmatics can be defined as a subfield of linguistics, some of the most important theoretical contributions to this field have been made by philosophers of language. Examples are J. L. Austin’s theory of *speech acts* – actions that are carried out by means of utterances but have consequences outside of the discourse or conversation, such as greetings, commands, requests, apologies, baptisms, or declarations of war – and H. P. Grice’ theory of *conversational implicatures* – inferences speakers and hearers make about each other’s communicative intentions, such as the inference that when I say *It’s cold in here*, I might want you to close the window. A third very important complex of phenomena studied within pragmatics is that of *deixis* or *indexicality* – the dependence of the meaning of many linguistic expressions on some aspect of the context in which they are used (an example is the pronoun *I*, which always refers to the speaker of the utterance, and the adverb *now*, which refers to the time at which the utterance is made).

Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of the structure of linguistic interactions that originally developed out of sociology. But unlike the field of sociolinguistics (see below), the emphasis in conversation analysis is not so much on the speech people use during conversations – such as the words they chose and how they pronounce these – but on how they negotiate the *turns* during a conversation – chiefly, who get’s to say something about what to whom at what point of the conversation. For example, powerful people are more likely to interrupt people of lesser power, and are likely to *hold the floor* longer. Conversation analysts ask how this plays out in interactions between men and women, doctors and patients, teachers and students, and so on.

Sociolinguistics is a subfield of linguistics that attempts to determine how sociological *variables* such as age, race, gender, and class influence language use. One important perspective within sociolinguistics is that of social *variation* – the fact that what words and constructions a speaker chooses to convey a certain idea and the pronunciation of those words and constructions varies, not just from region to region (in terms of *dialects* in the traditional sense of the term), but also with age, race, gender, class, and so on. In this respect, *variationist* sociolinguistics shares its domain with the study of *language and identity* within the field of linguistic anthropology (see below). The two approaches differ in their goals: variationist sociolinguists study variation primarily with the aim of modeling how language use and language change reflect the structure and makeup of society.

Linguistic anthropology (or *anthropological linguistics* – the two terms are used more or less interchangeably) is an approach to the study of language and *culture* at the intersection of cultural anthropology and linguistics. Linguistic anthropologists seek to understand language as an integral part of *culture* - the sum total of the knowledge and *practices* (socially shared habitual behavior) that an individual partakes in by virtue of being a member of a *community*. This perspective makes it possible for linguistic anthropologists to use linguistic evidence and methods of linguistics to illuminate the culture of the speech community and to bring cultural evidence and anthropological methods to bear on the study of those aspects of language that are culture-specific. Linguistic anthropology has developed several broad themes, each branching off into numerous different lines of inquiry. *Cognitive anthropology* focuses on the meanings expressed by the lexical items and grammatical constructions of a language, asking to what extent these reflect culture-specific conceptualizations of the speech community. For example, *ethnobotanists* and *ethnozoologists* study indigenous terminologies for life forms, seeking to determine what aspects of these vary from community to community, depending on the particular use of and significance attributed to a life form, and what aspects are shared across cultures, reflecting the shared biological and cognitive heritage of humankind. Similar research has targeted terminologies for color, kinship, emotions, tastes and smells, and so on. The most controversial idea in cognitive anthropology is the *Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis* - the hypothesis that the language habitually used by the members of a community may influence the way they memorize and conceptualize reality. The *ethnography of speaking* (or *ethnography of communication*), the second major sub-field within linguistic anthropology, examines culture-specific aspects of language use, viewing speaking itself as a cultural practice - from simple *speech acts* such as greetings and leave-takings via more complex “scripted” *speech events* (e.g., religious ceremonies, political speeches, court room proceedings) to the *ethno-poetic* study of verbal art and to culture-specific norms of linguistic politeness.

More recently, linguistic anthropologists have focused on the problem of *language and identity*. Like that of variationist sociolinguists described above, this project examines the relation between language use and *identity categories* such as age, gender, class, and race. However, while sociolinguists seek to describe the effects of such categories on language use in objective, quantitative terms, linguistic anthropologists

seek to understand how the use of certain linguistic variables (pronunciations, words, constructions) helps *define* perceived identity categories by means of *linguistic* (or *language*) *ideologies*. An identity category that we will pay particular attention to is that of *gender*.

A complex of phenomena studied by sociolinguists and ethnographers of communication alike, along with historical linguists, is *multilingualism*. *Code switching* concerns the question which factors determine the selection of a language in a given situation by people who speak more than that one language. Of course the competence of the addressee or hearer in one language or another matters, as does the topic of conversation; but so do a host of other factors – including language ideologies, the relative power, prestige, and “solidarity” between the interlocutors, and the formality of the situation. *Diglossia* refers to the existence, not of multiple mutually unintelligible languages, but of multiple dialects or varieties of one and the same language, within a single speech community. The factors that determine which variety/dialect is used in any given situation are very similar to those governing code switching. *Contact-induced change* is any change one language undergoes as a result of contact with another, from *borrowing* of words or morphemes via *calquing* of constructions or other abstract templates to the formation of *linguistic areas* (in which genealogically unrelated languages come to resemble each other through contact more than each language resembles genealogically related languages spoken outside the area) and *contact varieties* (including *pidgin* and *creole* languages) and eventually all the way to *language shift* and *language death*, where one language is replaced by another in the life of the community.

Goals of the course: Students should develop a “mental map” of the phenomena of language use that places them in the contexts and perspectives of the fields and approaches that study them. They should understand the basic questions each approach asks and the kinds of answers it seeks well enough to be in a position to decide whether they would like or need to immerse themselves further in any of these approaches and fields. When confronted with a phenomenon of language use in their future academic or non-academic practice, they should know the basic questions a linguist, sociologist, or anthropologist might ask about this phenomenon and where to look for existing research that might have addressed the phenomenon.

Classes: T/R 11:00-12:20 in 684 Baldy

Instructor: Dr. Jürgen Bohnemeyer – Office 642 Baldy Phone 645-0127

E-mail jb77@buffalo.edu Office hours TR 12:30 – 14:00

Coursework:

- Reading assignments and reading comprehension questions - there'll be a reading assignment from the textbook in preparation of each class. To make sure that students indeed read these before class, they are required to write up one question about each reading on a sheet of paper with their name on it. These questions will be collected in the beginning of class. The questions must concern the content of the particular reading, and they must be genuine questions the

student has when trying to understand the particular reading and thinking about the implications of the points made there. Both the number and the quality (in terms of thoughtfulness/incisiveness) of the questions submitted count towards the participation grade.¹

- Four homework assignments, involving mostly analyses of data provided with the assignments.
- A take-home final exam, consisting of a set of questions to be answered in single-paragraph essays (e.g., “What generalizations emerged from Berlin & Kay’s 1969 study of Basic Color Terms?”). The exam will be assigned in the final week of classes and must be completed within two weeks. Students may elect to write a short (maximally 10 pages) term paper in lieu of the final exam. The topic of the paper must be accepted by the instructor at least three weeks in advance of submission. Students may also present one of the primary readings on the syllabus (see below).
- Lit review presentations: Students may present a summary of one of the primary readings on the syllabus in class during the lecture for which the reading is listed in lieu of the final exam or one of the homework assignments. Presentations should be 10-20 minutes long and must include a handout.

Assessment: Participation (determined largely, but not exclusively, by the reading comprehension questions) and the four homework assignments count for 15% each; the final exam counts for 25% of the final grade.

Outline: Unless otherwise noted, reading assignments refer to the textbook, Bonvillian⁵2007. All other readings will be downloadable from UBlearns. Syntax of the reading assignments:

- *a; b* – read *a* and *b*
- *a; (b)* – read *a* plus optionally *b*
- *a/b* – read *a* or *b*, depending on which one was selected for discussion in class (and read the other optionally in addition if you’re interested)

¹ Students earn zero, one, or two points for questions on the reading assigned for a given class. To earn one point, they need to have or more questions of the kind that the assigned reading might raise in a reader with their background (a background of having taken college-level classes in language-and/or-culture-related subject areas). To earn two points, the questions need to be thoughtful and incisive (i.e., *not* merely the kind of questions one might ask if one just opens the book in a random place and considers a random sentence in isolation). At the end of the course, everybody gets a grade based on their reading points: 30 or more for an A; 28 for an A-; 26 for a B+, and so on, and an F for 11 points or fewer. This means that in order to score an A on the reading questions, you need to submit *quality* questions for a majority of the classes, and in order to avoid getting an F, you need to make sure that you submit questions to more than one third of the classes. The reading questions grade will make for 75% of the participation grade, which in turn constitutes 20% of your overall grade.

unit	week	day	date	topic	readings
intro	1	T	9/1	intro – the fields that study language use; semiotics, indexicality	ch.1
cognitive anthropology		R	9/3	universalism, relativism, and the linguistic relativity hypothesis	ch.3: 43-51; (Levinson 2003)
	2	T	9/8	ethnosemantics	ch.3: 51-76
pragmatics		R	9/10	pragmatics: conversational maxims; speech acts and routines * HW#1 out; due 9/22	ch.4: 94-96; ch.5: 119-122
ethnography of communication	3	T	9/15	speech events: the SPEAKING model	ch.4: 79-81 (Duranti 1997: ch.9; Hymes 1972; Sherzer 1989)
		R	9/17	ethnopoetics: narratives	ch.4: 96-106
	4	T	9/22	settings, formality, register; social deixis: terms of address	ch.4: 82-92
		R	9/24	directives in context	ch.5: 122-133
	5	T	9/29	politeness and face	ch.5: 133-136; Brown 2001; (Brown & Levinson 1987: 101-129)
		R	10/1	politeness across cultures * HW#2 out; due 10/20	ch.5: 136-140; (Matsumoto 1988; Ishiyama 2009; Keenan 1989)
sociolinguistics	6	T	10/6	language and identity; linguistic ideologies	ch.13: 385-393; (Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Irvine & Gal 2000)
		R	10/8	social stratification - caste: Gumperz in Khalapur; the education fallacy; Bernstein	ch.6: 146-148; 161-164
	7	T	10/13	honorifics: The case of Japanese (guest lecture Justin Boffemeyer)	ch.5: 140-143; Foley 1997: 318-323
		R	10/15	dialectology and variationist sociolinguistics (guest lecture Dr. David Fertig)	ch.6: 148-156
	8	T	10/20	social stratification - class: Trudgill: Norwich; Labov: NCCS	ch.6: 156-157; Labov 1994: 177-201; (Labov ms. 39-50)
multilingualism and language contact		R	10/22	Multilingualism, language attitudes, and bilingual education in the U.S.	ch.11: 306-307, 318-326, 328-333
	9	T	10/27	diglossia and code-switching, incl. Gumperz in Norway; Myers-Scotton in Kenya; Bonvillain on Quebec * HW#3 out; due 11/10	ch.12: 346-347, 349-359, 368-381 (Blom & Gumperz 1972; Myers-Scotton 1993: ch.2)
		R	10/29	a language contact situation in Canada: Pennsylvania-speaking Mennonites in the Waterloo Region (guest lecture Michael Frank)	t.b.a.
	10	T	11/3	contact-induced change; Gumperz in Kupwar	ch.12: 347-349; Gumperz & Wilson 1971
		R	11/5	pidgin and creole languages (guest	ch.11: 336-342

				lecture Dr. Jeff Good)	
	11	T	11/10	AAVE: origins	ch.6: 164-169; Labov 1982
		R	11/12	AAVE: use	ch.6: 169-179
	12	T	11/17	Afro-Caribbean speakers in the UK: history and some structural features; Puerto Rican speakers in NYC	ch.6: 179-183; ch.11: 326-327
		R	11/19	language shift and language death	Thomason 2001: ch.9; (Dorian 1981: ch.2-3; Schmidt 1985)
	13	T	11/24	endangered languages * HW#4 out; due 12/3	ch.11: 334-336; ch.12: 359-365; (Thomason 2001: ch.10)
		R	11/26	!!! Fall Recess!!!	
language and gender	14	T	12/1	the ethnographic approach	ch.7: 186-188, 193-194, 196-200; (ch.7: 210-217; ch.8)
		R	12/3	the sociolinguistic approach (incl. Eckert)	ch.7: 188-193, 194-195; (Eckert 1988)
	15	T	12/8	conversation analysis	ch.5: 114-119; ch.13: 396-402
		R	12/10	the conversation-analytical approach to language and gender (incl. Maltz & Borker, Tannen)	ch.7: 200-210

Reading list

Blom, J.-P. & J. Gumperz. (1972). Social Meaning in Linguistic Structures: Code Switching in Northern Norway. In: J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics*. New York Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Brown, P. (2001). Politeness and language. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences. Volume 17*. (Section Editor for Linguistics: B. Comrie). London: Elsevier. 11620-11624.

Brown, P. & S. C. Levinson. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Buchholtz, M. & K. Hall. (2004). Language and identity. In A. Duranti (ed.), *A companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. 369-394.

Dorian, N. C. (1981). *Language death: The life cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Duranti, A. (1997). *Linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eckert, P. (1988). Adolescent social structure and the spread of linguistic change. *Language in society* 17: 183-207.

Foley, W. A. (1997). *Anthropological linguistics: An introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Gumperz, J. J. & Wilson, R. (1971). Convergence and creolization: A case from the Indo-Aryan/Dravidian border in India. In D. Hymes (Ed.), *Pidginization and creolization in language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In D. Hymes & J. J. Gumperz (Eds.), *The ethnography of communication*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston. 35-71.

Hudson, R. A. (1996). *Sociolinguistics*. [2nd Edition!, reprinted 1998, 1999] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Irvine, J. & S. Gal. (2000). Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In P. Kroskrity, ed., *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press. 35-84.
- Ishiyama, O. (2009). A note on Matsumoto regarding Japanese verbs of giving and receiving. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41: 1061–1065.
- Keenan, E. (1989). Norm-makers, norm-breakers: Uses of speech by men and women in a Malagasy community. In Bauman & Sherzer (Eds): 125-143.
- Labov, W. (1982). Objectivity and commitment in linguistic science: The case of the Black English trial in Ann Arbor. *Language in Society* 11: 165-201.
- Labov, W. (1994). *Principles of Linguistic Change. Volume 1: Internal Factors*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Labov, W. Ms. *Principles of linguistic change. Volume 3: Cognitive and cultural factors. Chapter 5: Triggering events*. Manuscript, University of Pennsylvania.
<http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phonoatlas/PLC3/Ch5.doc>
- Levinson, S. C. (2003). Language and mind: Let's get the issues straight! *Language in mind: Advances in the study of language and thought*, ed. by Dedre Gentner and Susan Goldin-Meadow, 25-46. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mastumoto, Y. (1988). Reexamination of the universality of face: Politeness phenomena in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 12: 403-426.
- Schmidt, A. (1985). Speech variation and social networks in dying Dyrirbal. In Clyne (Ed.) 1985: 123-150.
- Sherzer, J. (1989). Namakke, sunmakke, kormakke: Three types of Cuna speech event. In Bauman & Sherzer (Eds.): 263-282.
- Thomason, S. (2001). *Language contact: An introduction*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.