

Course: LIN 315 Language in its social setting
Semester: Spring 2011
Instructor: Jürgen Bohnemeyer
Text: Wardhaugh⁶2010

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 12:30 – 13:50 in 108 Baldy

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E-mail jb77@buffalo.edu Office hours T 15:20 – 16:50, R 14:00 – 15:20

TAs: Jamie Root (UTA) – office hours T/R 14:30 – 16:00 in the Garvin Library;¹
Grayson Hamill (GTA) – office hours M 14:00 – 15:00/R 11:00 – 12:00 in 619 Baldy.

¹ The Garvin Library is the room between the LIN department office (609) and the Wolfgang Wölck Seminar Room (608 Baldy? – that would make the Garvin Library sound a bit like something out of Harry Potter, I suppose). The room may change. (Uhm, in a totally non-Harry-Potter-kind of way.)

Coursework:

- Preparatory reading. Reading assignments in preparation of each class. Mandatory readings from the main text book, typically around 10 pages per class. Optional advanced readings for those who like to follow up and get deeper into particular topics. See the schedule below.
- Twelve short weekly homework assignments, involving mostly analysis of data provided with the assignments. Performance on the best ten accounts for 60% of the overall grade. **No replacements/make-ups.** Students can elect to do a lit review presentation in lieu of three HW assignments (see below).
- 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 advanced readings listed on the course outline (see below).
- Lit review presentations: Students may present a summary of one of the advanced readings listed on the class outline below in class during the lecture for which the reading is listed in lieu of the final exam or three of the homework assignments. Presentations should be 10-20 minutes long and must include a handout.

Rolling assignment schedule: Assignments are released every Tuesday except during the first and last week and spring break. They will be discussed in class the following Thursday, are due the Tuesday after that, and will be returned two weeks after their release.

Assessment: Best 10 HW assignments – 60%; final exam – 25%; in-class participation – 15%.

Paperless class: Lecture notes will be posted on UBLearn/ Course Documents two hours ahead of class. Additional readings will be posted on UBLearn/ Course Documents two days ahead of class. Assignments will be posted on UBLearn/ Assignments. Students upload their home works to UBLearn/ Digital Dropbox. Please upload as PDF if you can. Be sure to click on “Send”, not on “Save”, to post! Annotated and graded home works will be returned via UBLearn/ Digital Dropbox or per e-mail. The same holds for the final exam. Students electing to do lit review presentations e-mail their handout in PDF to the instructor at least one day ahead of the presentation. The instructor will post the handout online.

Outline: Unless otherwise noted, reading assignments refer to the textbook, Wardhaugh⁶2010. All other readings are optional and will be downloadable from UBlerns.

unit	week	day	date	topic	readings (page numbers refer to Wardhaugh ⁶ 2010 unless otherwise noted)	
Intro	1	T	1/18	Knowledge of language; variation	1-8	
		R	1/20	Language and society; sociolinguistics and the sociology of language; methodological concerns; overview	8-19	
Linguistic varieties, language contact, multilingualism	2	T	1/25	Languages, dialects, and varieties: language or dialect?; standardization	21-40	
		R	1/27	Regional dialects; social dialects; styles, registers, and beliefs	41-51	
	3	T	2/1	Pidgins and creoles: lingua francas; definitions; distribution and characteristics	53-68	
		R	2/3	Origins; from pidgin to creole and beyond	68-83	
	4	T	2/8	Codes: diglossia; bilingualism and multilingualism	84-98 (Buchholz & Hall 2004)	
		R	2/10	Code-switching; accommodation	98-116 (Blom & Gumperz 1972; Myers-Scotton 1993: ch.2)	
	5	T	2/15	Speech communities: definitions	118-125 (Gumperz & Wilson 1971)	
		R	2/17	Intersecting communities; networks and repertoires	126-133	
	Variationist sociolinguistics: geographic vs. social variation; variation and language change	6	T	2/22	Language variation: regional variation; the linguistic variable	135-148
			R	2/24	Social variation; data collection and analysis	148-165
7		T	3/1	Some findings and issues: an early study; New York City; Norwich and Reading; a variety of studies	166-184 (Labov 1994: 177-201; Labov ms. 39-50)	
		R	3/3	Belfast; controversies	184-194	
8		T	3/8	Change: the traditional view; some changes in progress	195-214	
		R	3/10	The process of change	214-226 (Eckert 1988)	
9	T	3/15	SPRING RECESS			
	R	3/17				

Linguistic anthropology: cognitive anthropology and ethnography of communication; pragmatics: speech acts and implicatures	10	T	3/22	Words and culture: Whorf; kinship	227-242; (Levinson 2003)
		R	3/24	Taxonomies; color; prototypes; taboo and euphemism	242-252
	11	T	3/29	Whorf revisited: space	Majid <i>et al.</i> 2004
		R	3/31	Ethnographies: varieties of talk; the ethnography of speaking	253-265 (Duranti 1997: ch.9; Hymes 1972; Sherzer 1989; Keenan 1989)
	12	T	4/5	Solidarity and politeness: <i>Tu</i> and <i>vous</i> ; address terms	274-291
		R	4/7	Talk and action: speech acts	301-308
	13	T	4/12	Cooperation (conversational implicatures)	308-314
		R	4/14	Politeness	291-300 (Brown 2001; Brown & Levinson 1987: 101-129; Matsumoto 1988; Ishiyama 2009; Keenan 1989; Foley 1997: 318-323)
Language and identity	14	T	4/19	Language and gender: differences	331-342 (Buchholz & Hall 2004; Irvine & Gal 2000)
		R	4/21	Possible explanations	343-354
	15	T	4/26	Disadvantage: Codes again; African American English	356-367 (Labov 1982)
		R	4/28	Language diversity and globalization	401-407 (Evans 2010: 5-44; Thomason 2001: ch.9-10; Dorian 1981: ch.2-3; Schmidt 1985)

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.
- Evans, N. 2010. *Dying words: Endangered languages and what they have to tell us*. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- 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.
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- 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.
- Majid, A., M. Bowerman, S. Kita, D. B. M. Haun, & S. C. Levinson. 2004. Can language restructure cognition? The case for Space. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 8(3): 108-114.
- 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 Dyrbal. 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.