Course description

Language is critical in the formation of social groups and struggles for power and prestige among groups. This course will survey language diversity in American society, based on such variables as class, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, age, and region. Examination of language policy issues will illuminate the ways that dominant uses of language reinforce structured differences in social power and prestige among cultural groups. We will also examine political uses of language to both legitimize and challenge key aspects of the social order, with particular attention to discursive attempts by both liberals and conservatives to appropriate the American narrative in staking their territory on contested issues.

Required texts


Additional readings will be posted on e-reserve.

Course requirements

- Attendance 5% (more than 2 absences will result in no credit)
- Class preparation and participation 20%
- Sociolinguistic analysis essay 25% (due March 30)
- Case study—language groups, status inequality, and conflict 50%
  - conference with instructor (by March 3) 5%
  - annotated bibliography (by April 13) 5%
  - detailed outline of paper (by May 5) 5%
  - final paper (by 4:30 pm, May 19) 35%
Course Policies

This course will abide by the following grading system outlined by the Wellesley College Articles of Government (Book II, Article VII, Section 1):

Grade A is given to students who meet with conspicuous excellence every demand which can fairly be made by the course.
Grade B is given to those students who add to the minimum of satisfactory attainment excellence in not all, but some of the following: organization, accuracy, originality, understanding, insight.
Grade C is given to those students who have attained a satisfactory familiarity with the content of a course and who have demonstrated ability to use this knowledge in a satisfactory manner.
Grade D is a passing grade. There is no grade of D+ or D-.
Grade F denotes failure and a loss of credit for the course.

Academic honesty is expected of all students in accordance with the Wellesley Honor Code. Suspected honor violations relating to course work in this class will be reported to the General Judiciary.

Late papers and exams will not be accepted, except in cases of extreme emergency (such as hospitalization, death of a loved one). Minor illnesses, overscheduling, and perfectionism do not constitute extreme emergencies. However, if you have had a major disruption in your life and need extra time, I am willing to work with you; in such cases, please make a request as early as possible. Similarly, except for special cases, I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. Please come to class on time.

I will gladly make necessary accommodations for students with disabilities. Those needing accommodations are encouraged to work with either Jim Wice or Barb Burck in the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center in Clapp Library to make appropriate arrangements.

***Disclaimer: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus and course schedule. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on the course conference.
Course Outline

I Language and society

A. Getting acquainted; language histories and interests; overview – Feb. 2

Lippi-Green *English with an Accent* chapter 1

B. Language variation – Feb. 9

Lippi-Green *English with an Accent* chapters 2-3


C. Culture, meaning, and metaphor – Feb. 16


D. Language and social power—theoretical considerations – Feb 23


Lippi-Green *English with an Accent* chapter 4

Recommended:

II Language socialization

A. Language learning – March 2


Eckert, Penelope. 2003. “Language and Adolescent Peer Groups.” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 22:1, 112-118. (This journal is available online through Wellesley College library.)

Recommended:


Cook-Gumperz commentary in *Language and Women’s Place* (p. 195)

Carrie Secret interview in *The Real Ebonics Debate* (p. 79)

B. Language and identity –March 9

Lippi-Green *English with an Accent* chapters 5-7

Rodriguez “On Becoming a Chicano”


Recommended:


III Language and power

A. Gender and language -- March 16

Lakoff *Language and Woman’s Place*

Read: Author’s intro. & The Original Text; commentaries by Bucholtz (1), Holmes (5), Eckert (7), Hall (8), Meyerhoff (13), Ehrlich (15), and Kiesling (16)
B. Language and discrimination – March 30 & April 6

March 30


Recommended:


April 6
Lippi-Green *English with an Accent* chapters 8-10

Recommended:

C. Language status and language policy – April 13 & 20

April 13
Lippi-Green *English with an Accent* chapter 11

April 20


Recommended:


D. Rhetoric & political power – April 27

Lakoff, George. 1995. “Metaphor, Morality, and Politics: Or, why conservatives have left liberals in the dust.” *Social Research* 62:2, 177(37). (journal available online through college library)


E. Rhetorical resistance to power – May 4


Sociolinguistic Analysis Essay
Due March 31

The purpose of the essay is to engage in sociolinguistic analysis of an actual speech event in which two or more people (but not yourself) are involved. You should in some way record the event. You can either record speech in a natural setting (e.g., around campus or around town) or you can record something broadcast over some public medium. You should transcribe a segment of the recording of at least 5 minutes duration; attach your transcription to your essay. Your essay should analyze the linguistic and/or social features of the speech you record. You may comment on more than the segment that you transcribe, but your transcription should illustrate at least some of what you analyze.

Factors you may wish to consider include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Who is speaking? How does the speech reflect the social location(s) of the speakers? (age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, status or prestige) What lexical or phonological markers indicate the speaker’s identity?
- In general, how would you characterize the speech you recorded? Is it scripted or spontaneous? Is it formal or informal? Is it legitimate or illegitimate?
- What languages, codes, or dialects are used? If more than one, what is the relationship between them? If more than one variety is used by a single speaker, what seems to govern switching?
- What, if anything, might the speech you recorded indicate about the speakers’ worldviews? Are culturally-bound metaphors prominent? How might their speech reinforce a particular sense of reality?
- Does the speech reflect the process of language socialization at work? How? What is being learned?
- In what ways does the speech you recorded reflect a dynamic of power or privilege between the speakers?

Suggested length of essay: 6-9 pages (not including transcript)
For your course project, you will write a detailed case study of a language group involved in either an unequal status relationship or a social conflict in which language plays a part. The choice of cases can be driven by your own background and interests. Some of the kinds of topics you might think about include ethnic conflicts in which language is a prominent concern, conflicts over the status of a particular language or language variety, attempts to enact or resist change within a language or language group, struggles to maintain or gain social power that rely strategically on rhetoric or narrative, instances of development of specialized language features by dominant or dominated social groups, proposals of or protests to some language policy, the history of discrimination against a particular social group based significantly on linguistic matters, etc. The possibilities are extensive, and there is room to pursue divergent interests. You will select your topic and outline your approach to the case study in consultation with the instructor.

Deadlines for completion:
- By March 3—conference with instructor to select topic and propose case study method
- By April 13—annotated bibliography of sources (list of sources that includes a brief abstract of each resource and summarizes its usefulness to your project)
- By May 5—detailed outline of paper
- By May 19 (4:30 pm)—final paper due

Suggested length of case study paper is approximately 20 pages.