
LING 776: Language Variation and Change Over the Lifespan

Class Meetings	Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30-4:45pm ICC 204A
Professor	Jennifer Nycz jennifer.nycz@georgetown.edu Office hours: Thursdays 1-3pm in 224 Poulton or by appointment.
Readings	There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will be made available on Basecamp: https://basecamp.com/2712586/projects/10248942

Course Overview. In this seminar, we will focus on the acquisition and development of intraspeaker variation through the lifespan, from child acquisition of the linguistic and social constraints on variation to the adolescent peak of vernacular features (particularly within the context of high school, which Eckert 1997 has described as a ‘hothouse’ for the construction of identities via language and other semiotic resources), the post-adolescent retreat from the vernacular, the relatively unexplored stretch of ‘middle age’, and variation later in life. We will consider how changes over the lifespan reflect the changing social milieu of the speaker and what those changes may tell us about the underlying linguistic system. We will also explore the changes that occur when speakers come into sustained contact with new language varieties. Each student will design and pilot a study related to the course topic based on their own research interests, setting the stage for a more complete project that may serve as the basis for a QP or a dissertation proposal.

Requirements and Assessment

Participation (30%). Group discussion is a crucial component of this course; your attendance is required every day. Please come to class with comments, questions, and critiques related to the day’s readings and topic. If you are shy or otherwise have difficulty participating in group discussions, come talk to me about it and we’ll work out some strategies. You may also be asked to participate in online discussions or other activities. If prolonged illness or other matters (will) cause(s) you to miss multiple classes, please provide appropriate medical or other documentation.

Article presentation/discussion leading (30%) One person will lead the discussion for each article or chapter we read in class (this responsibility will rotate; number of presentations per person will depend on how many people are in the class). As the discussion leader, your job is to give a short (~5 minute) summary of the reading’s main goals and points and to think critically about it, raising questions for classroom discussion. I will distribute guidelines for how to do this.

Final paper (40%) You will write a 12-15 page paper on a topic relating to one or more of the themes of this course. More details will be given as the class progresses, but the paper preparation process will involve several stages:

- **The research question (2 pages; 5%).** A statement of the research question motivating your study, including why the question is important. Summarize the goals of your study and its predicted outcomes.
- **Literature review (3 pages excl. references; 5%).** A review of relevant previous work.

- **Critique of existing literature (2 pages; 5%).** Discuss methodological shortcomings, theoretical points unaddressed, empirical gaps, and other holes.
- **Proposal 1 (2 pages; 5%).** Revised research question and study predictions. Propose a study and describe your methods, focusing on data collection, processing, and linguistic analysis.
- **Proposal 2 (3 pages; 5%).** Revised Proposal 1, adding in statistical analysis if appropriate.
- **Analysis (4 pages, 5%).** Run a pilot study with a mini-dataset and report the results. Discuss whether the data support your predictions.
- **Presentation (20 min + discussion time, 5%).** Present your results so far to the class. Prepare slides and/or handouts as appropriate.
- **Final paper (12-15 pages excl. references, 5%).** Your final paper. This will consist of sections you have already written, revised to take into account written feedback as well as comments given during the class presentation. The paper should read as a coherent piece, and include a conclusion section.

Paper components and final product should be single-spaced using 11pt font, and include a header with your name and the section title (e.g. Research Question). Page numbers given represent maximums. **All written work must be submitted in doc or pdf format via Google Drive.** The **final paper** is due on **Monday December 14 by 5pm.**

Technology Policy: Laptop use is not permitted in class. Tablets/e-readers are ok.

Special accommodations: If you have a disability that will affect your performance in this class, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

Course Topic Schedule

Thursday 9/3: Variation, change, and the linguistic lifespan: Overview

Background readings (to be digested over the first few weeks)

- Eckert, Penelope. 1997. Age as a sociolinguistic variable. In Florian Coulmas (ed.), *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Blackwell: 151–167.
- Wagner, Suzanne Evans. 2012. Age grading in sociolinguistic theory. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6(6): 371–382.
- Wrzuz, Cornelia, Martha Hanel, Jenny Wagner, & Franz J. Neyer. 2013. Social network changes and life events across the lifespan: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 139(1): 53–80.

Tuesday 9/8, Thursday 9/10: Acquisition of variation in early childhood

Two readings from:

- Labov, William. 1989. The child as linguistic historian. *Language Variation and Change* 1: 85–94.

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- Foulkes, Paul, Gerry Docherty & Dom Watt. 1999. Tracking the emergence of structured variation: Realizations of (t) by Newcastle children. *Leeds Working papers in Linguistics and Phonetics* 7: 1–25.
 - Smith, Jennifer, Mercedes Durham, & Liane Fortune. 2007. “Mam, ma troosers is fa’in doon!” Community, caregiver and child in the acquisition of variation in Scottish dialect. *Language Variation and Change* 19(1): 63–99.
 - Nardy, Aurélie, Jean-Pierre Chevrot, & Stéphanie Barbu. 2013. Sociolinguistic convergence and social interactions within a group of preschoolers: A longitudinal study. *Language Variation and Change* 26: 273–301.
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📅 Monday 9/14: Research question (max 2 pages) due by 5pm

Tuesday 9/15: **Change from childhood to adolescence**

- Van Hofwegen, Janneke & Walt Wolfram. 2010. Coming of age in African American English: a longitudinal study. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14: 427–55.
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Thursday 9/17, Tuesday 9/22, Thursday 9/24: **Adolescence**

Three readings from:

- Labov, William. 1973. The linguistic consequences of being a lame. *Language in Society* 2: 81–115.
 - Eckert, Penelope. 2000. *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice*. Blackwell. (Excerpts)
 - Drager, Katie. 2009. A sociophonetic ethnography of Selwyn Girls High. Dissertation. Canterbury: University of Canterbury. (Excerpts)
 - Moore, Emma. 2010. The interaction between social category and social practice: Explaining was/were variation. *Language Variation and Change* 22(3): 347–371.
 - Lawson, Robert. 2011. Patterns of linguistic variation among Glaswegian adolescent males. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15(2): 226–255.
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📅 Monday 9/28: Literature review (max 3 pages) due by 5pm

Tuesday 9/29, Thursday 10/1: **The transition from adolescence to adulthood**

- Wagner, Suzanne Evans. 2012. Real time evidence for age grad(ing) in late adolescence. *Language Variation and Change* 24:179–202.
 - Rickford, John & Mackenzie Price. 2013. Girlz II women: Age-grading, language change and stylistic variation. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17(2): 143–179.
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📅 Monday 10/12: Literature critique (max 2 pages) due by 5pm

Tuesday 10/6, Thursday 10/8, Tuesday 10/13: **Adulthood & ‘Middle-age’**

- Sankoff, David, and Suzanne Laberge. 1978. The linguistic market and the statistical explanation of variability. In David Sankoff (ed.), *Linguistic variation: models and methods*. Academic Press.: 239–250.
 - Milroy, Leslie & James Milroy. 1992. Social network and social class: toward an integrated sociolinguistic
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model. *Language in Society* 21: 1–26.

➤ Mallinson, Christine & Becky Childs. 2007. Communities of practice in sociolinguistic description: Analyzing language and identity practices among black women in Appalachia. *Gender and Language* 1: 173–206.

Thursday 10/15: Old age

➤ Rose, Mary. 2008. Language, place and identity in later life. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University dissertation. (Excerpts).

Tuesday 10/20: Topic to be determined by class participants

➤ TBD

Thursday 10/22: No class (NWAV).

📅 MONDAY 10/26: PROPOSAL 1 (MAX 2 PAGES) DUE BY 5PM

Tuesday 10/27, Thursday 10/29: Change over the lifespan in the midst of community change

Two readings from:

➤ Nahkola, Kari & Marja Saanilahti. 2004. Mapping language changes in real time: A panel study on Finnish. *Language Variation and Change* 16: 75–92.

➤ Sankoff, Gillian & Hélène Blondeau. 2007. Language change across the lifespan: /r/ in Montreal French. *Language* 83(3): 560–588.

➤ Buchstaller, Isabelle. 2015. Exploring linguistic malleability across the life span: Age-specific patterns in quotative use. *Language in Society* 44: 457–496.

Tuesday 11/3, Thursday 11/5: Change over the lifespan & mobility

Two readings from:

➤ Chambers, Jack K. 1992. Dialect acquisition. *Language* 68: 673–705.

➤ Sankoff, Gillian. 2004. Adolescents, young adults, and the critical period: Two case studies from ‘Seven Up’. In Carmen Fought (ed.), *Sociolinguistic Variation: Critical Reflections*. Oxford University Press: 121–139.

➤ Evans, Betsy E. 2004. The role of social network in the acquisition of local dialect norms by Appalachian migrants in Ypsilanti, Michigan. *Language Variation and Change* 16: 153–167.

➤ Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena. 2009. Lifespan changes in the language of three early modern gentlemen. In Minna Nevala, Arja Nurmi, & Minna Palander-Collin (eds.) *The language of daily life in England (1450–1800)* John Benjamins: 165–196.

📅 Monday 11/9: Proposal 2 (max 3 pages) due by 5pm

Tuesday 11/10, Thursday 11/12: **Changes in production & perception**

- Evans, Bronwen G., and Paul Iverson. 2007. Plasticity in vowel perception and production: A study of accent change in young adults. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 121: 3814–3826.
 - Walker, Abby. 2014. Crossing Oceans with Voices and Ears: Second Dialect Acquisition and Topic-Based Shifting in Production and Perception. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University doctoral dissertation. (Excerpts)
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Tuesday 11/17, Thursday 11/19: **Modeling change**

- Foulkes, Paul & Hay, Jennifer B. 2015. The Emergence of Sociophonetic Structure. In Brian MacWhinney & William O’Grady (eds.), *The Handbook of Language Emergence* Wiley Blackwell: 292–313.
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📅 Monday 11/23: Analysis (max 4 pages) due by 5pm

Tuesday 11/24: **Topic to be determined by class participants**

Thursday 11/26: Thanksgiving Recess

Tuesday 12/1, Thursday, 12/3, Tuesday, 12/8: **Project presentations, Class wrap-up**

FINAL PAPERS DUE MONDAY, DECEMBER 14TH BY 5PM

Members of the Georgetown University academic community are bound by the Georgetown University Honor Code:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

We are obliged by university rules to report any apparent violations of the Honor Code to the Honor Council. According to the University Honor Code (<http://www.georgetown.edu/honor>), “Without regard to motive, student conduct that is academically dishonest, evidences lack of academic integrity or trustworthiness, or unfairly impinges upon the intellectual rights and privileges of others is prohibited.”

Violations of the honor system include cheating on exams or assignments, committing plagiarism, using false citations, submitting work for multiple purposes without prior permission of relevant instructors, submitting false data, falsifying academic documentation, abusing library privileges, and abusing shared electronic media. If you have any questions at all about the honor system, please contact us immediately.
