
LING 481: Sociolinguistic Variation

Class Meetings	Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00-12:15pm ICC 205B
Professor	Jennifer Nycz jennifer.nycz@georgetown.edu Office hours: Tuesdays 3:30-5pm in 224 Poulton or by appointment.
T.A.	Sean Simpson sss237@georgetown.edu @georgetown.edu Office hours: TBD
Readings	There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will be made available on Basecamp:

Course Overview. Language varies: within speakers, across speakers, and over time. This course is a theoretical and practical introduction to variationist sociolinguistics, the subfield of linguistics concerned with understanding the relationship between variation and language change and with describing and accounting for variation in terms of the linguistic and social factors which underlie it. What are the objects of study in sociolinguistic research? What kinds of questions can we ask about the relationship between language and society, and how do we use quantitative methods to find their answers? We'll address these foundational issues, read classic and contemporary papers in the field – about old fishermen, Harlem teens, high school cliques, salespeople, frat guys, politicians, and other remarkable language users – and apply what we've learned to group and individual projects exploring particular cases of variation.

Requirements and Assessment

In-class prompted writing (20%). We will begin most of our classes with a short writing activity based on the reading you did for class that day. I will provide some prompt (e.g. a question, a statement with which you might agree or disagree) and you will spend approximately 10 minutes writing down your thoughts. This writing will be collected at the end of class. The purpose of this activity is to get you warmed up for the discussion of the day and improve the quality of that discussion; as such, **there are no in-class writing make-ups.** These will be graded on a three-point scale (2: thoughtful response that draws on the reading to address the prompt; 1: response which doesn't address the prompt; 0: no response). I will take the 20 highest scores and divide their sum by 2 to determine the overall value of this grade component.

Participation (10%). Group discussion is a crucial part of this course. 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. Attending office hours and/or posting to the course website also count as Participation.

Homework assignments (30%). We will collaboratively carry out a project examining variation in a set of spoken interviews. In conjunction with this project, you will have 3 homework assignments intended to give you hands-on experience with quantitative variation analysis. Completing these assignments will help you plan and complete your final project.

Final project (40%). You will conduct a small-scale research project investigating linguistic variation at any level of language (e.g. phonetic, phonological, morphosyntactic) in any language. Your analysis must be quantitative and variationist in nature, though it can also incorporate qualitative elements. You will carry out your project in pairs or small groups (2-4 people per group), with the scope of the project depending on the number of investigators. Your group may choose to submit a single group paper (which will receive one group grade) or individual papers (individual grades). *In my experience, pair or group projects in this class tend to turn out better than solo projects: in a group you can cover more ground, divide up tasks, help each other figure out an analysis, and edit each other's work. It's also more fun!*

The final project grade will be determined based on your work *process* as well as the final *product*, with roughly 1/2 of the final project grade based on your project proposal, three progress reports, and class presentation, and 1/2 of the grade based on the final paper.

A **project proposal** from each group (or individual working alone) is due **Friday, October 28 by noon**. The proposal should be about 800-1000 words (roughly 2 pages) long and consist of the following:

- a statement of the research question motivating the study, including why the question is important (how it fits in with ongoing study, how it contributes to research in the field)
- a description of the data you will be drawing from and the linguistic and social variable(s) to be analyzed, as well as an explanation of why you are choosing this data and these variables
- a description of the proposed methods for collecting and analyzing the data
- a discussion of hypothesized results
- a discussion of problems/limitations that you foresee in conducting your research project
- three or four relevant references *beyond the class readings*

Project **progress reports** (300-800 words) are due **for 3 subsequent Fridays (November 4, 11, 18)**. In these progress reports you will briefly summarize your actions and thoughts regarding your project for the preceding week. Groups will submit a single progress report each week. Your group will give a short **presentation** of your findings in class **November 29 or December 1**.

The **final paper** is due on **Monday December 12 by noon**. The paper should be about 15-20 pages long, including figures and tables.

Attendance: Your attendance is necessary to make this class work and indirectly factors into your grade via completion or non-completion of the in-class writing activities. If prolonged illness or other matters (will) cause(s) you to miss multiple classes, please provide appropriate medical or other documentation.

E-mail schedule. I (Dr. Nycz) try to batch e-mail into just a few checks a day. On Tuesdays/Thursdays I'll typically check and respond to email around 10am, 1pm, and 4pm; on Mondays/Wednesdays/Fridays, around noon and then again at 4pm.

Technology Policy: Laptop and phone use is not permitted in class, except for specific meetings (notification provided in advance). Tablets/e-readers are ok.

Ethics: Members of the Georgetown University academic community are bound by the Georgetown University Honor Code. Please review the Honor Code, and if you have any questions about how it applies to work in this class, see Dr. Nycz or Sean.

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.

Excused absences: In certain circumstances, absences may be excused. When absences are excused, students remain responsible for all assigned work, and should make arrangements with the professor to make up any work that they have missed.

- **Absence for religious observances:** Students must notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with classes. Students who cannot be accommodated should discuss the matter with a dean.
- **Absence for athletic travel:** Student-athletes must provide their professors with a travel letter at the beginning of the semester which highlights potential absences. Students who cannot be accommodated for some or all absences should discuss the matter with the relevant Academic Coordinator for Student-Athletes.
- **Absence for documented illness:** Students who miss multiple classes due to prolonged illness should seek medical care and provide documentation of such to the Dean's Office, which will communicate with the student's professors. A prolonged absence may necessitate the students withdrawal from the course or from the University for the semester.
- **At the discretion of the professor:** There may be cases where an absence is undocumented but is, nevertheless, excused by the professor (e.g., absence due to a death in the family). Students should initiate a conversation with their professors about the nature and duration of the absence, in advance of the absence whenever possible. Students who anticipate missing multiple classes should inform the Dean's Office.

Course Schedule & Required Readings (to be completed by date given)

Thursday, September 1: Why study language variation?

Tuesday, September 6: Foundations of the field: Using the present to explain the past

➤ Labov, William. 1972 [1963]. The social motivation of a sound change. In *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. University of Philadelphia Press: 1–42. [originally published in *Word* 19: 273–309]

Thursday, September 8: Language change in real and apparent time

➤ Cukor-Avila, Patricia & Guy Bailey. 2013. Real time and apparent time. In J.K. Chambers & Natalie Schilling (eds.) *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Blackwell: 239–262.

Tuesday, September 13: The data

➤ Labov, William. 1972. Some principles of linguistic methodology. *Language in Society* 1: 97–120.

Thursday, September 15: The data, continued; Transcribing speech

➤ Tagliamonte, Sali. 2006. The linguistic variable. Ch.5 in *Analyzing Sociolinguistic Variation*, 70–97.

➤ Tagliamonte, Sali. 2006. Data transcription. In Ch.4 of *Analyzing Sociolinguistic Variation*, 53–63.

👉 ASSIGNMENT 1 (TRANSCRIPTION) GOES OUT

Tuesday, September 20: Defining the group: The speech community, social networks

➤ Dodsworth, Robin. 2014. Speech communities, Social networks, and Communities of Practice. In J. Holmes & K. Hazen (eds.), *Research Methods in Sociolinguistics*. John Wiley & Sons: 262–270.

➤ Labov, William. 1973. The linguistic consequences of being a lame. *Language in Society* 2(1): 81–115.

Thursday, September 22: Defining the group: Communities of Practice

➤ Dodsworth. (the rest of) Speech communities, Social networks, and Communities of Practice. 270–274.

➤ Lawson, Robert. 2011. Patterns of variation among Glaswegian adolescent males. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15(2): 226–255.

👉 *Friday, September 23: ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE BY NOON*

Tuesday, September 27: Variation in the individual speaker: Attention & Audience Design

➤ Rickford, John R. & Faye McNair-Knox. 1994. Addressee and topic influenced style shift: A quantitative study. In Douglas Biber & Edward Finegan (eds.) *Perspectives on Register: Situating Register Variation within Sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press. 235–276.

Thursday, September 29: Variation in the individual speaker: Speaker Design & Indexicality

➤ Ochs, Eleanor. 1992. Indexing gender. In Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (eds.) *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*. Cambridge University Press. 336–345.

➤ Kiesling, Scott Fabius. 1998. Men's identities and sociolinguistic variation: The case of fraternity men. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2(1): 69–99.

👉 ASSIGNMENT 2 (CODING) GOES OUT

Tuesday, October 4: Gender, Language change, & Stable Variation

➤ Eckert, Penelope. 1989. The whole woman: Sex and gender differences in variation. *Language Variation and Change* 1: 245–267.

Thursday, October 6: Age

➤ Eckert, Penelope. 1997. Age as a sociolinguistic variable. In Florian Coulmas (ed.) *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Blackwell: 151–167.

➤ Wagner, Suzanne Evans. 2012. Real-time evidence for age grad(ing) in late adolescence. *Language Variation and Change* 24: 179–202.

📅 *Friday, October 7: ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE BY NOON*

Tuesday, October 11: The visual display of quantitative sociolinguistic information

➤ Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erk Schlee & Lauren MacKenzie. 2015. Presenting your data. Chapter 13 in *Doing Sociolinguistics*. Routledge: 134–150.

➤ Kiesling, Scott. 2011. Describing patterns. In *Linguistic Variation and Change*. Edinburgh University Press: 41–45.

Thursday, October 13: Quantitative analysis

➤ Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erk Schlee & Lauren MacKenzie. 2015. Analyzing multiple independent variables. Chapter 14 in *Doing Sociolinguistics*. Routledge: 151–159.

📅 ASSIGNMENT 3 (ANALYSIS) GOES OUT

Tuesday, October 18: Social class

➤ Dodsworth, Robin. 2009. Modeling socioeconomic class in variationist sociolinguistics. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3(5): 1314–1327.

➤ Labov, William. 1972. The Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores. In *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press: 43–69.

Thursday, October 20: Ethnicity

➤ Schilling-Estes, Natalie. 2004. Constructing ethnicity in interaction. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8(2): 163–195.

📅 *Friday, October 21: ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE BY NOON*

Tuesday, October 25: Place

➤ Becker, Kara. 2009. /r/ and the construction of place identity on New York City's Lower East Side. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13(5): 634–658.

Thursday, October 27: Workshop: Finalizing Project proposals

➤ Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erk Schlee & Lauren MacKenzie. 2015. Finding a topic; Sample design and the envelope of variation. Chapters 1 & 2 in *Doing Sociolinguistics*. Routledge: 3–7; 16–24.

📅 *Friday, October 28: PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE BY NOON*

Tuesday, November 1: Investigating attitudes

➤ Preston, Dennis. 2013. Language with an attitude. In J.K. Chambers & Natalie Schilling (eds.) *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Blackwell: 157–182.

Thursday, November 3: CLASS CANCELLED FOR NWAV.

➤ Listen to *A Life of Learning: Six People I Have Learned From*, by William Labov (2009 Haskins Prize Lecture)
➤ Meet with your group to work on projects!

📅 *Friday, November 4: PROGRESS REPORT DUE BY NOON*

Tuesday, November 8: Investigating meaning: Experimental Approaches

➤ Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2011. The sociolinguistic variant as a carrier of social meaning. *Language Variation and Change* 22: 423–441.

Thursday, November 10: Meaning in context

➤ Podesva, Robert J., Jermy Reynolds, Patrick Callier, & Jessica Baptiste. 2015. Constraints on the social meaning of released /t/: A production and perception study of U.S. politicians. *Language Variation and Change* 27: 59–87.

📅 *Friday, November 11: PROGRESS REPORT DUE BY NOON*

Tuesday, November 15: Variation in an L2

➤ Drummond, Rob. 2012. Aspects of identity in a second language: ING variation in the speech of Polish migrants living in Manchester, UK. *Language Variation and Change* 24: 107–133.

Thursday, November 17: Variation in the mind

➤ Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2016. Towards a cognitively realistic model of sociolinguistic variation. In Babel, Anna (ed.), *Awareness and Control in Sociolinguistic Research*. Cambridge University Press: 123–151.

📅 *Friday, November 18: PROGRESS REPORT DUE BY NOON*

Tuesday, November 22: TBD based on class interest

➤ TBD

Thursday, November 24: Thanksgiving Recess

Tuesday, November 29 & Thursday December 1: Final project presentations

Tuesday, December 6: Course wrap-up

FINAL PAPERS DUE MONDAY DECEMBER 12TH BY NOON
