
LING 481: Sociolinguistic Variation

Class Meetings Tuesdays 5-7:30pm
 ICC 102

Professor Jennifer Nycz
 jennifer.nycz@georgetown.edu
 Office hours: Tuesdays 2-4pm and by appointment

See availability and book time on my calendar here:
<http://www.calendly.com/jn621>

T.A. Shannon Mooney
 sm2842@georgetown.edu
 Office hours: TBD or by appointment.

Required Texts Labov, William. 1966/2006. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*, **2nd Edition**. Cambridge.
 Eckert, Penelope. 2000. *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice*. Blackwell.

Other Readings will be made available on the course Canvas site.

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, social practice, and language change. 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 go about addressing these quantitatively? We'll pursue answers to these foundational questions by reading classic and contemporary work in the field – about old fishermen, Lower East Siders, nerd girls, jocks and burnouts, frat guys, and other remarkable language users – and apply what we've learned to group and individual projects exploring particular cases of variation.

Requirements and Assessment

Course blog contributions (20%). We will be using a class blog in this course as a forum for critique and reflection, and for sharing ideas and information relevant to the course. The purpose of the blog is for you to discuss, reflect, and demonstrate connections and ongoing engagement with the materials and content of this course. You are also expected to comment on other resources you find which are relevant to the course. More details on this will be given in a separate handout and rubric.

Participation (20%). Discussions of the concepts and data covered in readings are a key component of this course. You are expected to come to class prepared to talk about 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.

Homework assignments (30%). We will collaboratively carry out a project on an aspect of linguistic variation in a media source. 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 set you up to plan and complete your final project.

Final project (30%). You will conduct your own 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 individually or in small groups (2-4), with the scope of the project depending on the number of investigators. If working in a group, you may choose to submit a single group paper (which will receive one group grade) or individual papers (individual grades). **Group projects are highly encouraged: you can cover more ground, divide up tasks, and help each other figure things out. 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 1/3 of the grade based on your project proposal and three progress reports, and 2/3 of the grade based on the final presentation and written paper.

A **project proposal** from each group (or individual working alone) is due **Monday, November 6 by noon**. The proposal should be about 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

Project **progress reports** (max 1 page) are due **for 3 subsequent Mondays (Nov. 13, 20, 27th)** at noon. 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.

The **final paper** is due on **Tuesday, 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 the Participation assessment. If prolonged illness or other matters (will) cause(s) you to miss multiple classes, please provide appropriate medical or other documentation.

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.

Members of the Georgetown University academic community are bound by the Georgetown University Honor Code. If you have any questions about how the Honor Code applies to your work in this class, please ask Dr. Nycz.

Course Schedule (readings subject to change)

Tuesday, September 5: Introduction to the study of language variation and change

- 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]

Tuesday, September 12: The sociolinguistic variable; Getting the Data

- Labov 2006. Chapters 1–5 (p. 3–95)
- Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erik Schleeff & Laurel MacKenzie. 2015. Sample design and the envelope of variation. Chapter 2 in *Doing Sociolinguistics: A Practical Guide to Data Collection and Analysis*. (p. 16–22)
- Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erik Schleeff & Laurel MacKenzie. 2015. Transcription. Chapter 10 in *Doing Sociolinguistics: A Practical Guide to Data Collection and Analysis*. (p. 100–107)
- Hazen, Kirk. 2006. IN/ING Variable. In Keith Brown (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, 2nd Edition, Elsevier: 581–584.

Assignment 1 (Transcription) goes out.

Tuesday, September 19th: Interspeaker variation: Defining groups in the speech community

- Labov 2006. Chapters 6–8 (p. 96–198)
- Gumperz, J. J. 1968. The speech community. In D. L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Macmillan. 381–386.

Monday, September 25th: ☞ Assignment 1 due by noon

Tuesday, September 26: Linking synchrony and diachrony: Real and apparent time

- Labov 2006. Chapter 9 (p. 199–240)
- Sankoff, Gillian & Helen Blondeau. 2007. Language change across the lifespan: /r/ in Montreal French. *Language* 83(3): 560–588.
- Wagner, Suzanne Evans. 2012. Real-time evidence for age grad(ing) in late adolescence. *Language Variation and Change* 24: 179–202.
- Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erik Schleeff & Laurel MacKenzie. 2015. Identifying, coding, and summarizing your data. Chapter 11 in *Doing Sociolinguistics: A Practical Guide to Data Collection and Analysis*. (p. 111–121)

Assignment 2 (Coding) goes out.

Tuesday, October 3: Intraspeaker variation: Reconsidering style

- Bell, Allan. 1984. Language style as audience design. *Language in Society* 13(2): 145–204.
- Rickford, John & McNair-Knox. 1994. Addressee- and topic-influenced style shift: A quantitative sociolinguistic study. Addressee- and Topic-influenced Style Shift: a Quantitative Sociolinguistic Study. In Biber & Finegan (eds), *An Analytical Framework for Register Studies*. 235–276.

Monday, October 9th: ✍ Assignment 2 due by noon

Tuesday, October 10th: **Variation as social practice**

- Eckert 1999. Introduction, Chapters 1–3 (p. 1–84)
- Bucholtz, Mary. 1999. “Why Be Normal?”: Language and Identity Practices in a Community of Nerd Girls. *Language in Society* 28: 203–221.

Tuesday, October 17: **Analyzing variation in the social space**

- Eckert 1999. Chapters 4–8 (p. 85–228)

Tuesday, October 24: **Doing quantitative analysis of variation**

- Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erik Schleeff & Laurel MacKenzie. 2015. Analysing your data. Chapter 12 in *Doing Sociolinguistics: A Practical Guide to Data Collection and Analysis*. (p. 122–133)
- Meyerhoff, Miriam, Erik Schleeff & Laurel MacKenzie. 2015. Analysing multiple independent variables. Chapter 14 in *Doing Sociolinguistics: A Practical Guide to Data Collection and Analysis*. (p. 151–159)
- Rbrul tutorial (see Canvas).

Assignment 3 (Analysis) goes out.

Monday, October 30: ✍ Assignment 3 due by noon

Tuesday, October 31: **‘Third-wave’ sociolinguistics: Variation and indexicality**

- Kiesling, Scott Fabius. 1998. Men’s identities and sociolinguistic variation: The case of fraternity men. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2(1): 69–99.
- Kiesling, Scott Fabius. 2004. Dude. *American Speech* 79 (3): 281–305.
- Eckert, Penelope. 2008. Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12: 453–76.
- 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.

Monday, November 6: ✍ **Project proposals due at noon**

Tuesday, November 7: **Identifying meaning: Experimental approaches**

- Preston, Dennis. 2013. Language with an attitude. In J.K. Chambers & Natalie Schilling (eds.) *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Blackwell: 157–182.
- Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2011. The sociolinguistic variant as a carrier of social meaning. *Language Variation and Change* 22: 423–441.
- 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.

Monday, November 13: ✍ Progress report 1 due at noon

Tuesday, November 14: **Variation in the mind: Linguistic and social factors**

- Guy, Gregory. 2010. Sociolinguistics and formal linguistics. In Ruth Wodak, Barbara Johnstone & Paul Kerswill (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics*.
 - Foulkes, Paul. 2010. Exploring socio-indexical knowledge: A long past but a short history. *Laboratory Phonology* 1(1): 5–39.
 - Eckert, Penelope & William Labov. 2017. Phonetics, phonology, and social meaning. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2017: 1–30.
-

Monday, November 20: ✍ Progress report 2 due at noon

Tuesday, November 21: **Variation in the mind: Other cognitive factors**

- Wagner, Suzanne Evans & Ashley Hesson. 2014. Individual sensitivity to the frequency of socially meaningful linguistic cues affects language attitudes. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 33(6): 651–666.
 - Tamminga, Meredith, Laurel MacKenzie, & David Embick. 2016. The dynamics of variation in individuals. *Linguistic Variation* 16(2): 300–336.
-

Monday, November 27: ✍ Progress report 3 due at noon

Tuesday, November 28: Wild card day (Topic TBD)

Tuesday, December 5: Final presentations and course wrap-up

FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12TH BY 5PM