Introduction to Language

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Please remember to complete your online **course evaluations**! Check your email account for the invitation!!

"the bastardization of language"

"a breakdown in the English language"

"the linguistic ruin of [a] generation"

"grotesque"

"[it's] wreaking our language"

"i h8 [it]"

Computer Mediated Communication

CMC:
Any discourse that takes place through two networked computers/digital devices.
  ‣ Instant messaging
  ‣ Email
  ‣ Text messaging
  ‣ Twitter
  ‣ Facebook
  ‣ Forums/Discussion boards

CMC

Linguists classify different types of CMC by two parameters:
  ‣ Synchronous vs. Asynchronous
    • Is an response expected immediately?
  ‣ One-to-one vs. One-to-many
    • How many participants are involved?

	Synchronous	Asynchronous
One-to-one	IM, BBM, (texting)	email, texting, private messaging
One-to-many	chatroom	blogs, twitter, facebook comments

CMC

I'm a public defender of CMC
  ‣ CBC Newsworld
  ‣ OMNI Television
  ‣ CBC Radio
  ‣ Globe and Mail
  ‣ Toronto Star
  ‣ New York Times
  ‣ Washington Post
  ‣ Boston Globe
  ‣ New Scientist Magazine
  ‣ U of T Magazine
  ‣ National Geographic

CMC as a register of English

Between 2005 and 2008, Sali Tagliamonte and I conducted an in-depth study of CMC.
- ‣ We confirmed what David Crystal (2001:48) claimed back in 2001.
  - • The Internet was evolving a "new species of communication".

We argued that CMC is a **register**, complete with its own set of norms and conventions.
- Def. A "highly ritualized, routinized variet[y]" of language used in particular situations.
- ‣ Formal emails.
- ‣ Legal documents.
- ‣ Lecturing.

Consistent juxtaposition of "forms of a different feather" is the quintessential characteristic of CMC. [...] CMC appears to be a venue in which teenagers are free to use all these features together. The linguistic fusion is endemic to the register itself. Individuals pick and choose from all the available variants that their linguistic system has to offer and draw from the entire stylistic repertoire of the language that exists at a given point in time. If the teenagers did not already possess skilled command of their linguistic system, this would be impossible. The character and nature of [CMC] we have uncovered here reveals fluid mastery of the sociolinguistic resources in their speech community... We conclude that CMC is not the ruin of this generation, but an expansive new linguistic renaissance.

New Linguistic Renaissance

1) Male, 19, Computer-Mediated Communication
aaaaaagh the show tonight **shall** rock some serious jam!

2) Female, 15, Computer-Mediated Communication
Jeff **says** "lyk omgod omgod omgodzzzzzZZZ!!!!"

3) Female, 17, Computer-Mediated Communication
hehehe okieee! **Must** finish it now ill ttyl

4) Female, 18, Computer-Mediated Communication
lol.. as u can tell im **very** bitter right now

shall

Shall is a modal auxiliary that is part of the future temporal reference system of English.
- ‣ It is used to express the future tense along with other words like **will** and **be going to**
  - • star wars episode III **is going to**(/*will*/*shall*) suck just as much as the previous two
  - • by the way there **will**(/*is going to*/*shall*) be a jam session at my house
  - • i think i **shall**(/*will*/*am going to*) hit the sack

say

Say is a verb of quotation.
- ‣ It is used to introduce reported speech along with other verbs like **go** and **be like**.
  - • I emailed him and **said**(/*was like*/*went*) "when are you coming over?"
  - • he **was like**(/*said*/*went*) "uh... yeah..."
  - • some guy's running around the street **going**(/*being like* /*saying*) "world war three, oh my god it's world war three!" Do you remember that?

Must

Must is a deontic modal.
- ‣ It is used to expression obligation and necessity along with other elements like **have to** and **gotta**.
  - • I **must**(/*have to*/*gotta*) consult my Man-Bible.
  - • You**'ve gotta**(/*must*/*have to*) send me pics.
  - • We **have to**(/*must*/*gotta*) go up to Yorkdale.

very

Very is an adverb of intensification.

‣ It is used next to an adjective to increase the degree of what the adjective is expressing just like **really** and **so**
  - My clean room is **so**(/*very*/*really*) weird.
  - haha it was kinda creepy, but **very**(/*so*/*really*) cool.
  - I don't have any stories though my life is **really**(/*very*/*so*) boring.

So what?

These are four **sociolinguistic variables**.

‣ A set of different ways to say the same thing.
‣ Different **variants** of a sociolinguistic variable have different social correlations and social meanings.
‣ A variant could be used:
  - by more women than men;
  - by working class people and not middle class people;
  - when speaking to your boss and not when speaking to your friend.

So why did I highlight **shall**, **say**, **must** and **very**?

‣ What associations do you have with these words?
‣ What are their social meanings?

New Linguistic Renaissance

1. **Shall**
   - Oldest variant of the **Future Temporal Reference** variable system, and is nearly extinct in speech.
2. **Say**
   - The standard variant of **Quotative** variable system.
3. **Must**
   - Oldest and most formal variant of the **Deontic Modality** variable system.
4. **Very**
   - Oldest and most formal variant of the **Intensifier** variable system.

Our Study

We performed a long-term quantitative analysis of the language used in CMC.

1. The usage patterns of the four variables discussed above.
2. The usage of abbreviations and acronyms like **lol** and **ttyl**.
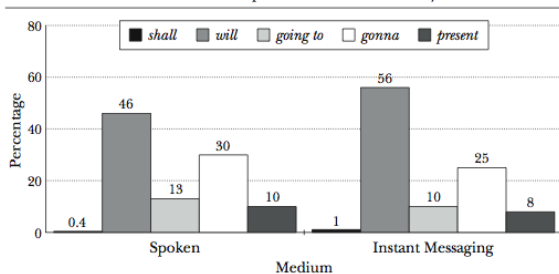
Methodology

We collected a corpus of more than **a million words** of CMC from 71 teenagers and more than **a quarter of a million words** of spoken English from a subset of the 71 teenagers.

‣ Group member interviewers
‣ This allowed us to make **a direct comparison between two registers**: vernacular, casual speech and computer-mediated communication.

Results

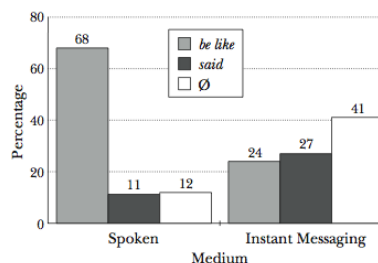Distribution of Future Temporal Reference Variants by Medium

‣ Non-standard *gonna* more frequent in speech.
‣ More frequent use of standard *will* and archaic *shall*.

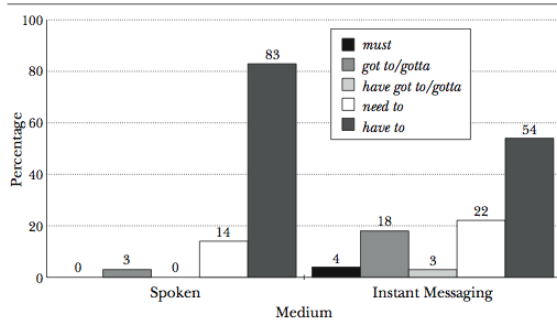
Results

Distribution of Quotative Verbs by Medium

‣ Innovative *be like* dominates in speech
‣ More robust use of the range of forms in CMC including a heightened use of the standard variant *said*.

Results

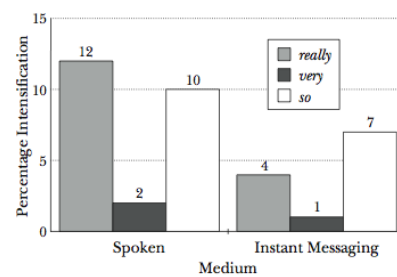#### Distribution of Deontic Modals by Medium

Legend:
- *must*
- *got to/gotta*
- *have got to/gotta*
- *need to*
- *have to*

- ‣ Incoming form *have to* dominant in speech.
- ‣ Wider range of variants in CMC than in speech (including formal *must*).

Results

Distribution of Major Intensifiers by Medium

Legend:
- *really*
- *very*
- *so*

- ‣ Less overall intensification in CMC. (Chart shows the frequency of adjectives modified by each intensifier).

CMC

Interim summary:

1. Less non-standard forms; more formal forms in CMC.
2. Existence of some highly formal forms in CMC
   - Don't appear at all in speech.

Even a prescriptivist must admit that this is not the "linguistic ruin of a generation"!

Features of CMC

Usually when the media talk about the "problems" with the language of Computer-Mediated Communication, they like to talk about abbreviations and acronyms like **lol** and **omg**.

*"Then there's the problem of ambiguity. With my vast knowledge of text language I had assumed **LOL** meant 'lots of love', but now I discover it means 'laugh out loud'. Or at least it did the last time I asked.*

*"But how would you know? Instead of aiding communication it can be a barrier. I can work out **BTW** (by the way) but I was baffled by **IMHO U R GR8**. It means: "In my humble opinion you are great." But, once again, how would you know?"*
— *John Humphrys, Mail Online, 24 September 2007*

Features of CMC

Unpacking Humphrys:

"The problem of ambiguity"
- ‣ When I recently gave a workshop on this topic to a bunch of high school students, they all knew what **lol** meant. I imagine you all do too.

"Instead of aiding communication it can be a barrier"
- ‣ The problem with Humphrys is that he doesn't understand **the speech community**.
  - Def. A speech community is a group of people "held together by common norms and aspirations" with respect to language (Gumperz 1982:24).

Features of CMC

What Humphrys is pointing out when he mentions ambiguity and barriers to communication is simply that he is **not** a member of the speech community who uses the abbreviations he mentions.

- ‣ He's not a teenager!

- ‣ In fact, he continues on to talk about how **he simply doesn't text people**.
- ‣ Why would someone who doesn't text think he should be able to understand the rules and conventions of an entire register of language?

Features of CMC

Speaking of barriers to communication...

Consider the next paragraph in Humphry's article:

"Let me anticipate the reaction to this modest little rant against the text revolution and the OED for being influenced by it. Its defenders will say language changes."

- What is OED?
- Not a single teenager knew what that was and why should they? They aren't academics, they aren't part of our speech community.

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Features of CMC

Abbrvs are not inherently terrible

CBC	NASA	tsp.
DVD	RCMP	in.
ASAP	FBI	kg
RSVP	H	pg.
Prof.	He	#
Dr.	Li	MIT
PhD	Be	U of T
MPP	B	BC
USA	C	AD
NATO	N	c.
SARS	O	$E = mc^2$
3D	tbsp.	etc.

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Features of CMC

Humphrys and other critics are missing three crucial points:

1. Speech communities and registers have a unique set of **shared conventions** with respect to language.
2. Abbreviations and acronyms have been part of English for a very long time.
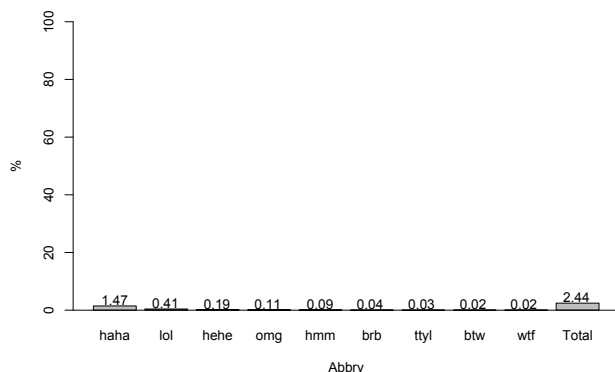3. Abbreviations and acronyms aren't actually very frequent in CMC!

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Features of CMC

Form	Frequency	Proportion of total word count
haha	16 183	1.47%
lol	4 506	0.41%
hehe	2 050	0.19%
omg	1 261	0.11%
hmm	1 038	0.09%
brb	390	0.04%
ttyl	298	0.03%
btw	249	0.02%
wtf	218	0.02%
...		
TOTAL	26 795	2.44%

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Features of CMC

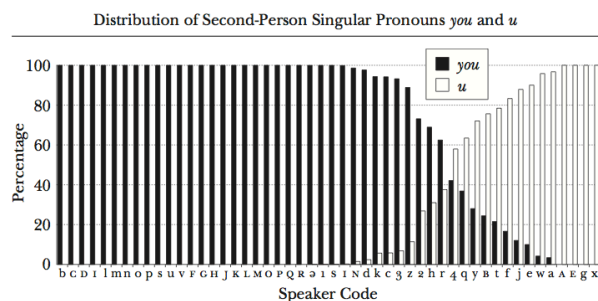**Proportion of Abbrvs of Total Word Count**

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Features of CMC

Innovative spelling and capitalization
- We saw earlier that CMC can use *u* for *you* and *i* for *I*.
- How frequently does this happen though?
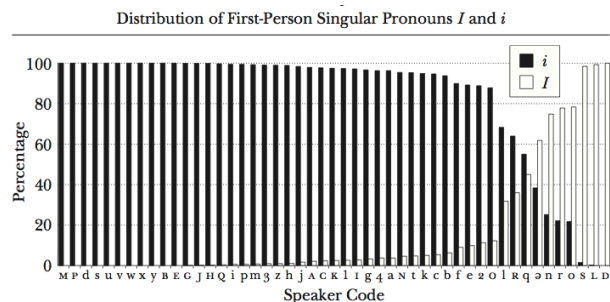 - Is there wild spelling and capitalization chaos?

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Features of CMC

Distribution of Second-Person Singular Pronouns *you* and *u*

Features of CMC

Distribution of First-Person Singular Pronouns *I* and *i*

Does this signal the beginning of the end for English?? No.

‣ ich (German), je (French), ég (Icelandic), io (Italian), niin (Ojibwe), ic (Old English)
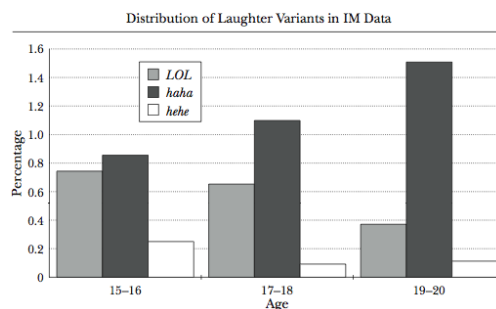
Features of CMC

Abbrvs
‣ Abbreviations are only a minor part of the registar of CMC.
‣ By and large, abbreviations are a **stylistic resource** — there are *you* people and *u* people; *I* people and *i* people — no robust variation between speakers. No capitalization chaos.

CMC is a fantastic venue for investigating the stylistic use of language — you must present your identity entirely through written language.

Linguistic Ruin? LOL.

Distribution of Laughter Variants in IM Data

As one gets older, more mature, the use of stereotypical abbreviations like *lol* becomes less frequent.

"Only kids use lol!"

CMC in short

In sum:
‣ CMC is a register unto itself.
  • Has elements of speech and writing.
‣ Teenagers exhibit robust variation in CMC including highly formal variants that aren't found in the speech of people their age.
‣ Abbreviations are a normal part of language and CMC has its own set of conventions.
  • Users of CMC know these conventions and use them accurately to communication

An older linguistic ruin…

In all of history, no one over 40 has ever been heard to say: "I love the way kids are talking these days."
— Bill Labov

Spoken Latin has picked up a passel of words considered too casual for written Latin, and the grammar people use when speaking has broken down. The masses barely use anything but the nominative and the accusative… it's gotten to the point that the student of Latin is writing in what is to them an artificial language, and it is an effort for him to recite in it decently.
(Source: McWhorter 2013).
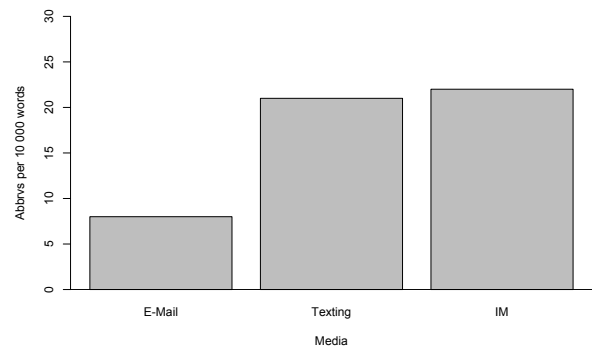
Date: 63 A.D. Topic: French

On-going work...

Sali Tagliamonte has been continuously collecting data:

‣ Texting
‣ Email
‣ IM
‣ Essays

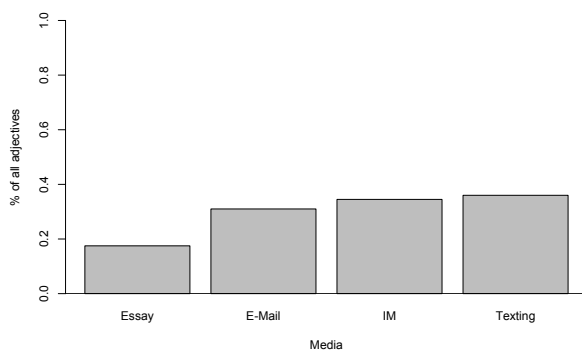Same speakers across each different media.

On-going work...

Frequency of abbrvs across three media
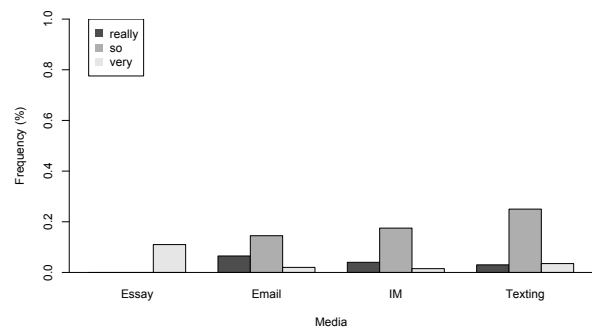

On-going work...

Frequency of intensified adjectives across three media

Intensifiers: "That's **really/so/very** stupid..."

On-going work...

Frequency of particular intensifiers across three media

Essay writing is clearly a different register.

On-going work...

Email

The most literary register of CMC.

‣ Longest turns, similar to letter writing.
‣ Least used by young people
‣ Considered formal and for communication with superiors, parents and authority figures.

Reflected in low rates of abbrvs and innovative variants like *so*.

IM and Texting

More innovation, more abbrvs

Upshot

"Young people are fluidly navigating a complex range of new media and using the conventions that are particular to each one." (Tagliamonte 2013).

Sooooome innovations

Because CMC is entirely text based, many aspects of spoken language are lost.

Eloooongations as prosody.

‣ *hey* vs. *heyyyy*
- Vowels more likely to be elongated than consonants.
- Most elongations are two or three letters extra.
- More common in texting than email.
- An attempt to express **emotional nuance** that we use prosody for.

TEXTING:

heyyyyy

FRIENDS　　I THINK　　TAKE THE　　LET'S FUCK　I'M DRUNK
　　　　　I LIKE YOU　HINT,

Sooooome innovations

"The period is pissed."

- *Pizza tonight?*
- *we could do that*
  vs. *we could do that.*
  vs. *we could do that...*
- "Not long ago, my 17-year-old son noted that many of my texts to him seemed excessively assertive or even harsh, because I routinely used a period at the end." (Mark Liberman)
- "Lookin' forward to having you spend Christmas with us..."
  (My father-in-law, in an email)

LOL as a pragmatic marker

Susan: I love the font you're using, btw.
Julie: lol thanks gmail is being slow right now.
Susan: lol, I know.
Julie: I just sent you an email.
Susan: lol, I see it.
Julie: So what's up?
Susan: lol, I have to write a 10 page paper.
(McWhorter 2013).

- No one's laughing!
- A phatic filler, marker of involvement.

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[... I]t is remarkable how often people say this sort of thing. It reaches newspaper columns and magazines as well as everyday conversations about language ("Oh, you're a linguist? What do you think about the way Internet slang is changing the language?"). I've heard a half-hour radio discussion about it on the BBC World Service (in the middle of the night; it was a real yawn, a perfect fix for my insomnia). It seems likely that at least some people really do think English might be altered radically by the intrusion of email abbreviations for phrases like "[I'm] rolling on the floor laughing" or "[I'm] laughing out loud" into regular spoken English.

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Don't worry. Nothing radical or even slightly significant will happen. Suppose, say, "rofl" became quite common in speech (which seems unlikely, since if your interlocutor falls down and rolls on the floor laughing it generally needs no comment; but maybe as a metaphor, or on the phone). What would have changed? One interjection (a word grammatically like "ouch") added. Total effect on language: utterly trivial. Not even noise level. Interjections are so unimportant to the fabric of the language that they are almost completely ignored in grammars. There's almost nothing to say. They have no syntactic properties at all — you pop one in when the spirit moves you. And their basic meaning is simply expressive of a transitory mental state ("Ouch!" means something like "That hurt!"). Don't worry about English. It will do fine. Not even floods of email-originated phrases entering the lexicon would change it in any significant way.

Geoffrey Pullum. (2007). English in deep trouble? *Language Log.*

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Quick Review

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What we've done in this course

What language is.

- Core properties of language/grammar.
- Prescriptive vs. descriptive.
- Standard vs. non-standard.

The Domains of Language

- Phonetics
- Phonology
- Morphology
- Syntax
- Semantics/Pragmatics

Key topics

- L1 Acquisition
- L2 Acquisition
- History of English
- Historical Linguistics
- Sociolinguistics
- Language and Ethnicity
- Language and Identity
- Languages Death and Revitalization
- Language and the Internet

All fair game on the final!

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Domains of Language

Phonetics

- The IPA and the sounds of English.
- Anatomy and Physiology of Speech.
- Articulatory Properties of Sounds.
- Acoustic Properties of sound.

Phonology

- Phonotactics and syllable structures.
- Prosody.
- Phonemes and Phonemic/Phonetic Transcription.
- Allophonic variation and rules.
- Natural Classes and Distinctive Features.

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Domains of Language

Morphology
- ▸ Types of morphemes.
- ▸ Word Formation and structural ambiguity.
- ▸ Morphology in other languages.
- ▸ Morphological alternations.

Syntax
- ▸ Grammatical Categories.
- ▸ Generative rules and the infinity of syntax.
- ▸ Hierarchical structures and phrases.
- ▸ Syntactic trees and ambiguity.

Domains of Language

Semantics
- ▸ Semantic ambiguity.
- ▸ Different approaches to meaning.
- ▸ How to combine a noun and a verb to have a sentential meaning.
- ▸ Connections to logical connectors and quantifiers.

Pragmatics
- ▸ Context shapes utterances.
- ▸ Utterances shape context.
- ▸ Aspects of a conversation.
- ▸ Conversational implicatures.

Key Topics

First Language Acquisition
- ▸ Innateness.
- ▸ Stages of phonological acquisition.
- ▸ Babies as great phoneticians.
- ▸ Phonological strategies.
- ▸ Morphological acquisition.
- ▸ Stages of syntactic acquisition.

Second Language Acquisition
- ▸ Critical period hypothesis.
- ▸ Factors affecting L2 acquisition.
- ▸ Interlanguage and transfer.

Key Topics

History of English
- ▸ Historical background (who conquered who).
- ▸ Various influences on English.
- ▸ Grammatical features of Old, Middle, Early Modern English.

Historical Linguistics
- ▸ Genetic relations between languages.
- ▸ Language families of the world (esp. Indo-European).
- ▸ Reasons languages seem similar.
- ▸ Reconstruction and identifying changes.

Key Topics

Sociolinguistics
- ▸ Language variation and sociolinguistic variables.
- ▸ Language change.
- ▸ Languages transmit more than semantic meaning:
  - • Personal traits, sociological information, **linguistic style**, and **social features**.
- ▸ The sociolinguistic interview and style shifting.
- ▸ Hypercorrection.

Canadian English
- ▸ History of Canadian English.
- ▸ Homogeneity.
- ▸ Lexical, phonological, morpho-syntactic features of CanEng.
- ▸ *eh!*

Key Topics

Language and Ethnicity
- ▸ Ethnolects.
- ▸ Linguistic profiling.

Language and Identity
- ▸ We use sociolinguistic variables to express our personal identities.
- ▸ Audience Design vs. Speaker Design.
- ▸ Acts of Identity theory.

Key Topics

Languages of Canada, Death, and Revitalization
- The languages and language families of Canada.
- Viability of languages in Canada.
- Reasons for the decline of aboriginal languages (e.g., residential schools system).
- Why save languages.
- Ways to save languages.

Language and the Internet
- CMC and sociolinguistic variables.
- CMC features.
- CMC as a register of English.

Final

December 16, 7 to 9pm. (Check exam schedule for your room)
- Cumulative.
- A focus on the second half.
- Same style as midterm.
- More multiple choice.
- You'll have the same charts of the English consonants and vowels.

Help labs etc.:
- Wednesday, Dec. 11, 6pm (Room TBA)
- Thursday, Dec. 12, 6pm (Room TBA)
- Monday, Dec. 16, 11am (Room TBA)
- Extra office hours on Tuesday Dec. 10

What I hope you got from this course...

- A basic working knowledge of the human language faculty and language in general.
- An ability to assess popular myths and misconceptions about language.
- Lots of fun party facts!

Continuing interest in linguistics

Blogs
- Language Log: http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/
- All Things Linguistic: http://allthingslinguistic.com/

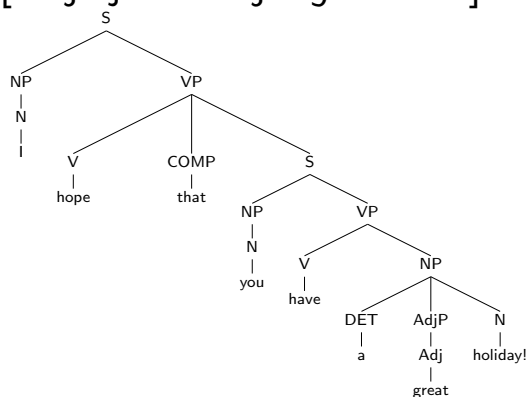### Courses you can take in linguistics without pre-reqs or with LIN200 as a pre-req
- English Words (LIN203)
- English Grammar (LIN204)
- Phonetics (LIN228)
- Writing Systems (JAL328)
- Canadian English (LIN201)

Society of Linguistics at Undergraduates (SLUGS)
- Organizes one or two talks per semester and other linguistic related events.
- https://www.facebook.com/uoftslugs

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