

Anthropology / Linguistics 234: Communication and Culture

Spring 2025

Course Information

Time: T/TH 13:00-14:15

Location: KR-JH 101

Professor: Spencer Chen

Email: scchen@hamilton.edu

Office Hours: T/TH 14:30-16:30 at KR-JH 243

*No office hours on the first Tuesday of each month (due to Faculty Meetings) and during Week 13 (Nov 17–21)

Course Description

This course introduces students to topics and methods in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. This semester, with a particular focus on the concepts of “self (re)presentation” in everyday and mediated spaces, the course will explore questions such as: What does it mean to present—or re-present—a “self” through language? How do social interactions, institutions, and technologies shape the ways we display who we are? To what extent do we “own,” “perform,” or “market” a self, and how do others “buy into” (or resist) these presentations? What are the stakes of such performances in different contexts? How do linguistic markets (Bourdieu) structure which ways of speaking carry value, authority, or profit, and how do individuals negotiate these markets in pursuit of recognition or belonging?

In our search for answers to these questions, we will survey a variety of ethnographically-grounded linguistic observations to understand how our semiotic practices (e.g., languages, gestures, facial expressions, clothing styles, etc.) both reflect and facilitate our (re)construction and (re)presentation of different “selves” in naturally-occurring and mediated interactions, from storytelling, identity politics, discrimination and social injustice, ethno-nationalism, media representation, to workspaces and globalization.

Students will learn to think about language not merely as a linguistic structure but more crucially as *a complicated social process integral to the larger construct conveniently called “culture” in the quotidian discourse*. Through this course, students will develop the ability to critically interrogate myriads of taken-for-granted myths about language and culture.

Please be advised that this is a discussion-intensive seminar. Active participation in class discussions is mandatory and constitutes a significant portion of your final grade. Students seeking a lighter option to fulfill their major requirement should understand that this course is deliberately structured to demand rigorous engagement in writing, analysis, and discussion.

Land acknowledgment: The Department of Anthropology and the Linguistics Program at Hamilton College acknowledges our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Oneida peoples.

Course Objectives

Students in this course will learn how to:

- **Deconstruct** the quotidian notions of “communication,” “accent,” and “identity;”
- **Cultivate** sensitivity to the creative use of language in everyday and mediated interactions;
- **Contextualize** linguistic microculture within the macro sociocultural and political exosystem;
- **Reconceptualize** the notions of “self” and “others;”
- **Analyze** the relationship between culture and communication;
- **Apply** foundational concepts in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics
- **Get experience deconstructing** “communication” through assignments and writing;
- **Present and communicate** their ideas and opinions in productive and respectful ways through seminar discussions, writing activities, and class presentations

Course Materials

Assigned readings are available as downloadable PDF files on the Blackboard site for the course under the “Documents” tab. Please respect their copyrights and do NOT circulate these materials elsewhere.

For students unfamiliar with anthropology, linguistics, or communication studies, some of the readings might require additional time to digest. You are thus strongly advised to start early and read ahead, and also review the materials before you start your assignments. The following recommended books offer assessable introductions to both linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, with effective summaries of some of the key findings and theories in these fields.

Ahearn, Laura. 2021. *Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*.
Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.

Trudgill, Peter. 2000. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. London:
Penguin Books.

Course Requirements

Participation 20%

Active participation is the key to the success of this class, during which you and I both learn together from each other through open and respectful discussions. Attending class means being present and participating. Simply being with us bodily does not count as “being present.”

You may choose to opt out of TWO class periods during the semester – with no questions asked and no need to email me to tell me why — but you are required to keep up with the material. For each absence after two, your grade will drop a step, e.g., from an A to an A-.

Reading Responses 20%

Reading the assigned readings is required. But reading them is just a job half done. You also need to actively process them to fully digest the content and internalize their arguments.

Writing is one of the two primary methods to achieve this (the other is to do an oral presentation, in case you are wondering).

Thus, starting Week 3, you will begin to submit short reading responses to the class readings (up to 200 words). You will post these on the Blackboard by 23:59 the day before class. For example, for the class meeting on Tuesday, Sept 9, you must post your response by 23:59 on Monday, Sept 8.

A reading response is a piece of writing that demonstrates your grasp of the material. Similar to writing an academic paper, you should use your OWN words and limit the amount of direct quotations in your writing. And please DO NOT waste the space to cite the full title of the paper. That is, for example, instead of saying,

In his article “Linguistic Anthropology: Language as a Non-Neutral Medium,” Alessandro Duranti argues that linguistic anthropologists “share some core ideas about a small set of essential properties of language, all of which are centered upon one basic assumption, namely, that *language is a non-neutral medium*” (2011:29)

You should simply say,

Duranti maintains that linguistic anthropology takes as its core concept that “language is a non-neutral medium” (2011:29).

Reading responses are meant to help you reflect on what you have read, contemplate the new (and old) ideas, and articulate your opinions constructively. It is always productive to start with a brief summary of the article/s (1-2 sentences at most) before you lay out your thoughts. To effectively communicate your ideas, you can always identify a connection, and/or a confusion, in relation to your personal experience, current events, or other readings in the class.

Your responses will be graded on **satisfactory completion**. That is, if you include all the required information for each reading, and your responses are evidently based on a good-faith to read and study the texts *independently*, you will receive full credit. You may choose to opt out of ONE response in the entire course. For each opt-out after the first one, you will start to lose points. Additionally, if you miss more than five, your grade will drop a step, e.g., from an A to an A-. Resubmission or make-up will be NOT accepted.

Surveys	5%
----------------	-----------

I care about your learning and am very open to suggestions and constructive feedback – your input is crucial to me as an educator and co-learner in our journey to understanding humanity. There will be a **mid-term check-in survey** (2.5%) and a **final survey** (2.5%) for you to complete. These forms allow you to share your thoughts regarding what works well and what does not – and I will communicate with you and modify the course schedule and requirements by incorporating your input.

Training Project	25%
-------------------------	------------

The Training Project, as its name suggests, is designed to train you to see, think, and write as a linguistic anthropologist – and most importantly, it will prepare you for the Final Small-Scale

Research Project. This progressive learning experience consists of **three component assignments**, each building on the knowledge and skills developed in the previous one. This step-by-step approach ensures a solid foundation and promotes continuous improvement.

25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">7.5 % – Week 1 : Asgmt #1 (Language Learning Autobiography)7.5 % – Week 5 : Asgmt #2 (Interview & Transcription)10 % – Week 8 : Asgmt #3 (Analytic Essay)
-----	--

In principle, with the exception of Assignment #1, you will have an average of 3 weeks to complete each assignment.

Assignment #1 requires you to video-record yourself narrating your own language learning experiences and then write a post-recording reflection. For **Assignment #2**, you will pair up with a classmate (or two if there is an odd number of students) to interview them about their language learning experiences. The interview must also be recorded. You will then transcribe verbatim a portion of that interview that interests you the most. Finally, for **Assignment #3**, you will write an analytical essay based on a critical analysis of both your own and your partner's narratives.

Assignments #1 and #2 are completion-based, allowing you to focus on “getting your hands dirty” as you collect the data. Assignment #3, however, will be graded based on your level of engagement with the collected material and course readings, as well as your writing presentation. ***More detailed instructions will be handed out in class ahead of time.***

Final Small-Scale Research Project 25%

The mini-ethnographic project is designed to give you the freedom **to investigate a linguistic phenomenon of your interest at your own pace over approximately two months**. Rather than testing your memory of the course materials, this project requires you to apply those course materials to analyze your chosen linguistic phenomenon in context. You will record what happens in that setting and explore how participants use language in socially meaningful ways to achieve their shared goal(s). The final write-up should be **2000-2500 words** in length and is due on **Friday, December 19, by 23:59 (*HARD DEADLINE)**.

Preparation for this project will commence in Week 9, following the completion of the Training Project. In Week 12, regular class sessions will be replaced with one-on-one office hours, during which I will meet with you individually to brainstorm ideas and refine your project prospectus. You will have the autonomy to plan your research and writing activities, pace your progress, and assess your execution according to your own approach. You are strongly encouraged to consult with me and your peers as often as needed for feedback and support.

25% –	<ul style="list-style-type: none">--- – Week 12 : One-on-One Project Meeting5 % – Week 13 : Asgmt #4 (Midway Check-In Report)20 % – Week 17 : Asgmt #5 (Final Write-Up Essay)
+	5 % – Week 16 : Final Presentation (<i>See below</i>)

In Week 13, you will submit a **midway check-in report** (Assignment #4) documenting your progress. In Week 16, you will present your project findings, and in Week 17, you will submit the final write-up. ***More detailed instructions will be provided in Week 9.***

To prepare and write your final paper, you should regularly consult **the writing tutorial** created by the History Department: <https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing/writing-resources/writing-a-good-history-paper#anachronistic%20moralizing>. Grading in this course aligns with the tutorial.

Final Presentation 5%

In Week 16, we will dedicate the meetings to what I call “the Celebration of Knowledge.” **You will present your Final Project for 10-15 minutes.** The primary goal of this presentation is for you to share your findings with your classmates.

**Attendance at these presentations is a hard requirement. Being present for your classmates' presentations is a matter of basic respect for their work and for the collaborative spirit of the class. Missing the presentation days without documented reasons—even if you have already presented—will result in a zero for this component and will lower your final course grade by one step (e.g., from an A to an A-).*

Rather than treating this as a high-stakes presentation (because it should not be!), you may think of this as an opportunity to introduce your chosen phenomenon to your classmates. Let's make this stress-free and enlightening. More details on the presentation, such as the format, content, and other logistics, will be provided later this semester. And we will sort out the sign-up later this semester when you have a clearer idea of what you will do for the project.

Final Grade

Learning is assessed in many ways, through in-class participation, writing, discussions, and regular check-ins. This class does not have any “tests” (assuming we never will need to administer reading quizzes). Grading is not on a curve, so you are not in competition with your classmates. Help each other out and learn together. But remember, you are ultimately responsible for your final grade. Your final grade will be based on the total amount of points you get from all the course requirements. See the grade breakdown below:

Participation	20%	
Reading Responses	20%	
Surveys	5%	Mid-Term Survey 2.5 % Final Survey 2.5 %
Training Project	25%	Asgmt #1 = Language Learning Autobiography 7.5 % Asgmt #2 = Interview & Transcription 7.5 % Asgmt #3 = Analytic Essay 10 %
Final Project	30%	Asgmt #4 = Midway Check-In 5 % Asgmt #5 = Write-Up 20 % + Final Presentation 5 %
TOTAL	100%	

Practical Matters

Email Policy

Please contact me via email if you have concerns that cannot be addressed during class or office hours. **Remember to include “Anthro 234” (OR Ling 234) in the subject line of your email.** Due to the large amount of emails and obligations I must attend to on a daily basis, please allow 24 hours for a response. If you do not hear from me after 24 hours, please send me another reminder. For more complicated questions that cannot be answered in a few lines, please meet and discuss with me in person.

Office Hours

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 14:30–16:30, except for the first week of each month due to faculty meetings (Sept 2, Oct 7, Nov 4, and Dec 2) and the entire Week 13 due to a business trip. These office hours are open for walk-ins, with each meeting allotted 15 minutes unless another student has scheduled an appointment. If you prefer to schedule a specific time, the sign-up sheet is available at: <https://calendar.app.google/EKZqdP7T3iqsmFVG9>. If you are unable to attend my office hours, please email me to arrange an appointment at an alternative time.

Late Submissions

Late submissions will be penalized accordingly. The deadlines set in this class are intended to help you work consistently through the quarter and provide opportunities for skill-building, guidance, and feedback. If you are falling behind, please reach out to me as soon as possible so we can make the necessary adjustments.

Academic Integrity and the Hamilton College Honor Code

Academic honesty is expected, normed, and anticipated. Every student has signed the Honor Code and should know the College’s policies on academic integrity (<http://www.hamilton.edu/student-handbook/studentconduct/honor-code>). Please contact me if you are unsure about any academic policy relating to the Hamilton College Honor Code.

All submissions in this class must be your own original work produced for this class (unless otherwise specified). I assess your ideas and your own words, not someone else’s. And that includes Generative AI such as ChatGPT. When you use external sources, please use them appropriately with proper citations. Accidental plagiarism is a common problem, so if you have trouble quoting, citing, and paraphrasing, please contact me, the library, or the writing center for guidance. Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an immediate ZERO for the assignment and will be reported to the Dean of Students.

To avoid plagiarism, I encourage you to read Hamilton’s “Avoiding Plagiarism” webpage, available at <http://www.hamilton.edu/style/avoiding-plagiarism>. As a general rule, attribute any idea to the source from which you found it. **And, when in doubt about a policy for citation, please ask!** To learn more about how to cite sources properly, have a look at the American Anthropological Association’s guide (<https://americananthro.org/publications/publishing-style-guide/>) to citation based on the Chicago Manual of Style.

Accessibility and Accommodation Resources

Hamilton College will make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are best made early in the semester, except in unusual circumstances, so that adjustments can be implemented in a timely manner. If you are eligible for accommodations and would like to make a formal request for this course, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. All discussions will remain private and confidential. You will need to provide Allen Harrison, Assistant Dean for Accessibility Resources (aharris0@hamilton.edu) with appropriate documentation of your disability.

Course Schedule and Assigned Readings

Considering the fast-paced nature of the semester and the amount of information in the assigned readings, I highly encourage you to start early and pace yourself to ensure you do not fall behind. The chart below visualizes our weekly schedule, including lectures, office hours, and assignment deadlines. Feel free to use it to plan your work and personal schedules.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon		13:00-14:15 Seminar 14:30-16:30 Office Hours		13:00-14:15 Seminar 14:30-16:30 Office Hours			
Evening	23:59 Response due		23:59 Response due				23:59 Asgmt. Due

WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION	
Aug 28, TH	No reading. Please read the syllabus before class.
Aug 31, SUN	<p>Assignment #1 (LLA) due 23:59 on Blackboard.</p> <p>*This is a completion-based assignment. There is NO right answer. Please write from your heart and pour everything you can recall about your language learning experiences.</p>

WEEK 2 FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES	
Sept 2, T	Ahearn, L. 2021. "The Socially charged life of language." In <i>Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology</i> , 3 rd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. Pp. 3-34.
Sept 4, TH	Goffman, E. 1956. "Performances." <i>The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i> . Pp. 10–46. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
WEEK 3 PRESENTATION OF SELF THROUGH NARRATIVES	
Sept 9, T <i>*Responses begin.</i>	Wortham, S. and A. Reyes. 2015. "Discourse Analysis across Events." In <i>Discourse Analysis beyond the Speech Event</i> . Pp. 1–39. New York, NY: Routledge.
Sept 11, TH	Ochs, E. 2004. "Narrative Lessons." In <i>A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology</i> , edited by A. Duranti. Pp. 269–289. Oxford: Blackwell.
WEEK 4 NARRATING SELF AND OTHERS	
Sept 16, T	Everhart, E. 2021. "Crafting (non)accented linguistic identity in Northeastern Japan." <i>Journal of Anthropological Research</i> . 77(1): 35–51.
Sept 18, TH	IN-CLASS WORKSHOP – TRANSCRIBING NATURALLY OCCURRING SPEECH <i>*This workshop will focus on developing skills for accurately transcribing naturally occurring speech. No reading is required.</i>
WEEK 5 LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL ECONOMY	
Sept 23, T	Bourdieu, P. 1991. "Price Formation and the Anticipation of Profits." In <i>Language and Symbolic Power</i> , edited by J. Thompson, translated by G. Raymond, and M. Adamson. Pp. 66–89. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Sept 25, TH	Cameron, D. 2000. "Styling the worker: Gender and the commodification of language in the global service economy." <i>Journal of Sociolinguistics</i> 4(3): 323–347.
Sept 28, SUN	Assignment #2 (Interview) due 23:59 on Blackboard. <i>*This assignment is a continuation of Asgmt #1 and is also completion-based. To complete it, you will need to pair up with another classmate, interview them about their LL experiences, and transcribe the interview.</i>
WEEK 6 IDEOLOGIZING GROUP (DIS)MEMBERSHIP THROUGH LANGUAGE	
Sept 30, T	Kroskrity, P. 1998. "Arizona Tewa Kiva Speech as a Manifestation of a Dominant Language Ideology." In <i>Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory</i> , edited by B. Schieffelin, K. Woolard, and P. Kroskrity. Pp. 103–22. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
Oct 2, TH	Su, H-Y. 2023. "Politeness as Signs of Difference: Semiotic Differentiation and Identity among Taiwanese in China" <i>Journal of Sociolinguistics</i> 27: 66–86.

WEEK 7 TALK IN ACTION	
Oct 7, T	Goodwin, M. 1980. "He-Said-She-Said: Formal Cultural Procedures for the Construction of a Gossip Dispute Activity." <i>American Ethnologist</i> 7(4): 674–695.
Oct 9, TH	Duranti, A. 2006. "Narrating the Political Self in a Campaign for the U.S. Congress." <i>Language in Society</i> 35(4): 467–97.

WEEK 8 LANGUAGING: THE CASE OF RACE	
Oct 14, T	Rosa, J. 2019. "They're bilingual... That means they don't know the language': The Ideology of Languagelessness in Practice, Policy, and Theory." In <i>Looking Like a Language, Sounding like a Race</i> . Pp. 133–151. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
Oct 16, TH	NO CLASS – FALL RECESS

WEEK 9 SEMIOTICS AND SIGNS: ENREGISTERMENT	
Oct 21, T	Mendoza-Denton, N. 2011. "The Semiotic Hitchhiker's Guide to Creaky Voice: Circulation and Gendered Hardcore in a Chicana/o Gang Persona." <i>Journal of Linguistic Anthropology</i> 21(2): 261–280.
Oct 23, TH	Johnstone, B. 2011. "Dialect Enregisterment in Performance." <i>Journal of Sociolinguistics</i> 15(5): 657–679.
Oct 26, SUN	<u>Assignment #3 (Analysis) due 23:59 on Blackboard.</u> <i>*This assignment is a continuation of Asgmts #1 and #2 and requires you to write an analytic essay based on your transcribed interview and your own reflection. Your paper is graded following formal essay standards.</i>

WEEK 10 MEDIATING SELF AND OTHERS	
Oct 28, T	Gershon, I. 2010. "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do: Media Switching and Media Ideologies." <i>Journal of Linguistic Anthropology</i> 20(2): 389–405.
Oct 30, TH	Slobe, T. 2018. "Style, Stance, and Social Meaning in Mock White Girl." <i>Language in Society</i> 47(4): 541–567.

WEEK 11 WORK AND (SELF-)BRANDING	
Nov 4, T	Urciuoli, B. 2008. "Skills and Selves in the New Workplace." <i>American Ethnologist</i> 35(2): 211–228.
Nov 6, TH	Mapes, G. 2023. "The Life of a Political Speech(writer): Metadiscursive Text Trajectories in High-End Language Work." <i>Journal of Linguistic Anthropology</i> 33: 264–284.

WEEK 12 ONE-ON-ONE BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS	
Nov 11, T	NO CLASS – ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS IN KR-JH 243 <i>*There will be no seminar meeting on this day. Instead, one-on-one sessions will be held in KR-JH 243 from 10:00 through 13:00.</i>
Nov 13, TH	NO CLASS – ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS IN KR-JH 243 <i>*There will be no seminar meeting on this day. Instead, one-on-one sessions will be held in KR-JH 243 from 10:00 through 13:00</i>

WEEK 13 DATA COLLECTION AND FREE-WRITING WEEK	
Nov 18, T	NO CLASS
Nov 20, TH	NO CLASS
Nov 23, SUN	Assignment #4 (Midway Check-In) due 23:59 on Blackboard. This “assignment” serves as a midway check-in. You do not need to write a separate progress report. Simply submit your unfinished working draft, field notes, recordings, and other documents that showcase your work-in-progress.

WEEK 14 THANKSGIVING	
---	---

WEEK 15 COMMODIFYING LANGUAGE & CONCLUSION	
Dec 2, T	Manning, P. 2012. “Coffee.” In <i>Semiotics of Drink and Drinking</i> . Pp. 35–59. New York, NY: Continuum.
Dec 4, TH	Thurlow C., and D. Britain. 2020. “Voice Work: Learning about and from Dialect Coaches.” In <i>The Business of Words: Wordsmiths, Linguists, and Other Language Workers</i> , edited by C. Thurlow. Pp. 67–85. New York, NY: Routledge.
Dec 5, F	Walk-In Data Sessions in KR-JH 243, 14:30–17:00

WEEK 16 CELEBRATION OF KNOWLEDGE	
Dec 9, T	PRESENTATIONS
Dec 11, TH	PRESENTATIONS
Dec 12, F	Walk-In Data Sessions in KR-JH 243, 14:30–17:00

WEEK 17 FINALS WEEK	
DEC 19, FRI	Assignment #5 (Final Write-Up) due 23:59 on Blackboard <i>*THIS IS A HARD, NON-NEGOTIABLE DEADLINE. MISSING THIS WILL RESULT IN AN IMMEDIATE ZERO. PLEASE PLAN ACCORDINGLY.</i>

ANTHRO / LING 234	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
WEEK 1	8/26	8/27	8/28	8/28 SEMINAR	8/29	8/30	8/31 ASGMT 1 due
WEEK 2	9/01	9/02 SEMINAR	9/03	9/04 SEMINAR	9/05	9/06	9/07
WEEK 3	9/08	9/09 SEMINAR	9/10	9/11 SEMINAR	9/12	9/13	9/14
WEEK 4	9/15	9/16 SEMINAR	9/17	9/18 WORKSHOP	9/19	9/20	9/21
WEEK 5	9/22	9/23 SEMINAR	9/24	9/25 SEMINAR	9/26	9/27	9/28 ASGMT 2 due
WEEK 6	9/29	9/30 SEMINAR	10/01	10/02 SEMINAR	10/03	10/04	10/05
WEEK 7	10/06	10/07 SEMINAR	10/08	10/09 SEMINAR	10/10	10/11	10/12
WEEK 8 FALL RECESS	10/13	10/14 SEMINAR	10/15	10/16 FALL RECESS	10/17	10/18	10/19
WEEK 9	10/20	10/21 SEMINAR	10/22	10/23 SEMINAR	10/24	10/25	10/26 ASGMT 3 due
WEEK 10	10/27	10/28 SEMINAR	10/29	10/30 SEMINAR	10/31	11/01	11/02
WEEK 11	11/03	11/04 SEMINAR	11/05	11/06 SEMINAR	11/07	11/08	11/09
WEEK 12	11/10	11/11 1-ON-1 MEETINGS	11/12	11/13 1-ON-1 MEETINGS	11/14	11/15	11/16
WEEK 13	11/17	11/18 NO CLASS	11/19	11/20 NO CLASS	11/21	11/22 THXGIVING	11/23 ASGMT 4 due
WEEK 14 THXGIVING	11/24 THXGIVING	11/25	11/26	11/27	11/28	11/29	11/30
WEEK 15	12/01	12/02 SEMINAR	12/03	12/04 SEMINAR	12/05 EXTRA WALK-INS	12/06	12/07
WEEK 16	12/08	12/09 PRESENTATIONS	12/10	12/11 PRESENTATIONS	12/12 EXTRA WALK-INS	12/13	12/14
WEEK 17 FINALS	12/15	12/16	12/17	12/18	12/19 FINAL PROJ due	12/20	12/21