Linguistics 140: Language in the US
Carleton College, Spring 2024
Instructor: Christopher Geissler

Goals and Objectives

This course investigates aspects of the structure of language in order to better understand aspects of the history and society of the United States. Students of linguistics will try out new kinds of applications of their knowledge, namely, applying the results of linguistic analysis to the social domain. Students of other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities will learn a new perspective and source of information through which to better understand topics of their interest.

After taking this course, students will meet the following overarching **goals**:

(1) Explain similarities and differences among language varieties with respect to the methods and findings of historical linguistics and linguistic geography
(2) Quantify linguistic variation to draw inferences about American society
(3) Analyze the use of language to index systems of power
(4) Synthesize information from (1)-(3) by proposing a novel research study making use of linguistic data

Course Structure

This course consists of the following modules:

- **Foundations**: Overview/review of major concepts in linguistics: the International Phonetic Alphabet, constituency structures, the Comparative Method
- **Variation:** Social correlates of language differences
- **Power:** The use of language in systems of power
- **Histories:** Reconstructing the past with language data

Time and Place

Class: Tuesdays/Thursdays, **13:15-15:00** in **CMC 301**

Chris' café hours (drop-in): Schultz Café (Table 4), 09:30-11:00 Mondays
Chris' office hours (Calendly link): Willis 406, 09:30-11:30 AM Wednesdays or by arrangement

Textbook

There is no textbook to purchase for this course. Readings will be provided on Moodle.

Tentative schedule

This version is preliminary and subject to change. For up-to-date information, see the "Detailed Schedule" linked on Moodle.

Assignment types: Practice/Reading Post, **Short Paper**, **Proposal**

Week	Dates	Topic	Read before class	Submit before class
1	3/26 3/28	Foundations	Tu: - Th: Zsiga Ch. 2	Tu: - Th: Practice: Sounds
2	4/2 4/4		Tu: *Essentials* Ch. 6.1-6.5 Th: *Essentials* Ch. 10	Tu: Practice: Structures Th: -
3	4/9 4/11	Variation	Tu: Labov Th: Eckert, Dinkin	Tu: **Short Paper: Problem Set,** Posts Th: Posts (one of two)
4	4/16 4/18		Th: Poplack	Th: **Short Paper: Variation**
5	4/23 4/25	Power	Tu: Bucholtz*2 Th: Rickford&King	Tu: **Short Paper: Variation,** Posts Th: Posts
6	4/30 5/2		Tu: Engman&King Th: Nichols	Tu: **Short Paper: Power.** Posts Th: Posts
7	5/7 5/9	Histories	Tu: Silver&Miller Ch12 Th: Silver&Miller Ch11	Tu: **Short Paper: Power,** Posts Th: **Proposal Topic Ideas**, Posts
8	5/14 5/16		Tue: [no class] Thu: *We Still Live Here* documentary screening	Tu: **Short Paper: Histories** Th: **Annotated Bibliography**
9	5/21 5/23		Tu: Silver&MillerCh13 Th: Greenhill et al 2023	Tu: Posts Th: **Proposal Sketch**
10	5/28	(wrap-up)	Tu: -	Tu: -
Finals	-6/3	**Proposal Final Draft** due last day of exams (midnight June 3rd)		

Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be calculated as follows:
• Practice Assignments and Response Posts: 20%
• Short Papers (6): 50%
• Proposal: 30%
  • Of which: Topic Ideas 5%, Annotated Bibliography 5%, Sketch 5%, Final Draft 15%

Practice Assignments are just that: practice. These are mandatory, because you need to practice *doing* things in order to learn them. They do not receive a grade, but you will be given feedback, either in writing or in class.

In place of a numerical grade, Practice Assignments will be marked as follows
• "✔": for submissions completed in their entirety (irrespective of whether answers are "right")
• "✔-": for submissions that are late, incomplete, or lack effort
For grading purposes, "✔" counts as "1" and "✔-" counts as "0.5". At the end of the semester, this number will be summed and divided by the number of Practice Assignments.

Reading Response Posts are designed to facilitate active engagement with, and reflection on, the readings. For each reading from a source other than *Essentials*, you will write about a paragraph in a forum post on Moodle. Unlike other assignments, these are due by 8:00 AM before class–this is so Chris can read them and incorporate them into class discussion. Reading Response posts will be marked "✔" or "✔-" and treated as Practice Assignments.

Short Papers deepen your engagement with particular topics. Only the first of these is fully prescribed: the "Short Paper" for the "Foundations" section of the course is a problem set featuring the analysis techniques in the practice assignments. For the rest, you can choose from a "menu" of genres listed below and on the course Moodle page. Two Short Papers should reference the "Variation" section, two the "Power" section, and one the "Histories" section of the course.

In the **Proposal**, you will develop a research study of your own–but not conduct the study! You will formulate the motivation, question, predictions, and implications of a study that you could actually imagine conducting, given time and resources. This will be developed over a series of intermediate deadlines.

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day for which they are assigned (or 8:00 AM for Reading Posts). Unexcused late submissions will be treated as follows:
• Practice Assignments and Reading Posts: any late submission will be marked as "✔-".
• Short Papers and Proposal stages: Each day (including the first) for which the assignment is late will impose a penalty to the calculated grade equal to 10% of the maximum grade.

Revisions are welcome! For any short paper or proposal assignment (except the final proposal), you can re-write your submission to address feedback. Before doing so, you may ask Chris for additional feedback to clarify what you should do.

Short Paper Options

Other than the first "Short Paper", which will be a problem set, you are free to choose from the following types of paper. There is no specific maximum or minimum length, but I expect around 500-750 words (2-3 double-spaced pages). One page might be too short, five pages might be too long.

Short papers should relate to the theme of the corresponding section of the course: two for "Variation", two for "Power", and one for "Histories". Except where otherwise noted, any genre of paper can be used for any assignment. Within those restrictions, you can use any genre of paper as many times as you like.

See the course Moodle page for instructions and the grading rubric for each type of paper.

- **Scholarly Response:** Read an academic paper not assigned for this class (or a combination of an assigned paper plus a non-assigned paper) in-depth, summarize it, and respond. Your response may or may not cite other sources, and can offer a critique or propose extensions.

- **Opinion Response:** Read a non-academic article, typically one published in the Opinion section of a newspaper (or online equivalent). Offer a critique backed by scholarly linguistic sources, including but not limited to the course readings. Before starting, send Chris the article for his approval before the *previous* class session.

- **Linguistic Biography:** "Power" only. Interview a person (family member, friend, anyone) and tell the story of their relationship with language.

- **Variety Profile:** Pick a language variety from the US and do some library research in order to describe aspects of its linguistic structure and social/historical/geographic context. This can be a dialect of American English, (a dialect of) an indigenous language, or a non-indigenous language. The profile should highlight relevant themes of variation, power, or history/geography depending on which assignment it "counts" for.

- **Phenomenon Profile:** Conduct library research on a specific phenomenon from a particular language. Many subsections of *Silver & Miller* offer a good starting point, often when the subsection is called "[phenomenon] in [language name]". This profile can also investigate a phenomenon in a non-indigenous language, such as from the Yale Grammatical Diversity Project. You are encouraged to place this in the typological context of other languages using the World Atlas of Linguistic Structures.

Accommodations, Inclusion, and More

Your experience in this class is important to me (Chris).

I am a resource for you. This is my job. This is why I'm here.

There are also other resources that may be able to help you. Here are a few of them:

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Office of Accessibility Resources (Henry House, 107 Union Street) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum disorders, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision, hearing, mobility, or speech impairments), please contact OAR@carleton.edu to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

Inclusion (provided by TRIO, the Office of Intercultural Life, the Office of International Student Life, and the GSC)

I strive to create an inclusive and respectful classroom that values diversity. Our individual differences enrich and enhance our understanding of one another and of the world around us. This class welcomes the perspectives of all ethnicities, cultures, gender identities, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, regions, and nationalities.

Student Well-Being

Your health and well-being should always be your first priority. At Carleton, we have a wide array of resources to support students. It is important to recognize stressors you may be facing, which can be personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. Sleep, exercise, and connecting with others can be strategies to help you flourish at Carleton. For more information, check out [Student Health and Counseling](#) (SHAC), the [Office of Health Promotion](#), or the [Office of the Chaplain](#).

Title IX

Carleton is committed to fostering an environment free of sexual misconduct. Please be aware all Carleton faculty and staff members, with the exception of Chaplains and SHAC staff, are "responsible employees." Responsible employees are required to share any information they have regarding incidents of sexual misconduct with the Title IX Coordinator. Carleton's goal is to ensure campus community members are aware of all the options available and have access to the resources they need. If you have questions, please contact Laura Riehle-Merrill, Carleton's Title IX Coordinator, or visit the [Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website.](#)

Collaborating with Humans and Machines

Working Together

Linguistics–like many things–is a deeply collaborative endeavor. You are likely to benefit greatly from working with your classmates. You are encouraged, though not required, to work with your classmates (except on the Critique Paper). For any submission with which you worked with others, write "worked with ____" after your name at the top of the submission. However, each person must submit their own writeup, and formulate the submission in their own words. Exceptions for co-authored papers are noted below.

- Practice Assignments and Problem Set (first Short Paper): separate submissions following group discussion, with credit, is acceptable (and encouraged!)
- Response Posts: each post should be written by one person and discuss a different idea (or aspect of an idea). When discussing together, divide your ideas into individual posts.
- Short Papers: You are welcome to coordinate and write two papers that focus on different aspects of the same topic. Alternatively, you can write one longer, co-authored paper, which should cite additional sources and be larger in scope in proportion to the number of authors. Check with Chris at least one class period in advance if you are considering this.
- Proposal: check with Chris early in the process if you are considering co-authorship.

Generative AI

The following statement was written by Cati Fortin, and is based on discussions across the Linguistics Department at Carleton. I, Chris Geissler, participated in those discussions and agree with the result. This policy is shared across Carleton Linguistics courses.

In this course, I feel strongly that each of you will have the best possible learning and intellectual experience, and realize the most growth in your skills as a student, writer, researcher, and linguist, if you do not use large language models such as ChatGPT and Google Bard in your work for this course. You'll achieve the most benefit if you (in collaboration with the other human participants of this exploration) are the one doing the intellectual work. I also think you'll have the most fun this way.

I am proceeding in this course on the expectation that you will NOT use large language models such as ChatGPT and Google Bard in your work for this course. However, the availability and possible applications of large language models are evolving rapidly. There are many interesting questions to be asked and meaningful discussions to be had about the role of these tools in learning and writing in general, as well as within the context of the type of linguistic inquiry we're undertaking in this course. Our views on the role, and possible benefits, of these tools surely differ from one another, and will just as surely continue to evolve. If you believe, at any point this term, that your learning or your experience would in some way be positively enhanced by using these types of models, I am available for a conversation about what you have in mind. If this is the case, you MUST talk to me about it BEFORE using such tools. If we decide together that the particular use case you propose is consistent with the goals of the course, we will need to ensure that (i) the tools are cited appropriately and (ii) all the course participants have the same access and understanding before proceeding.

Readings

These readings will be available on Moodle as well as in the Zotero group. The Zotero group also includes supplemental readings, including options for Scholarly and Opinion responses.

Bucholtz, Mary, Nancy Bermudez, Victor Fung, Rosalva Vargas & Lisa Edwards. 2008. The Normative North and the Stigmatized South: Ideology and Methodology in the Perceptual Dialectology of California. *Journal of English Linguistics* 36(1). 62–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0075424207311721.

Bucholtz, Mary & Qiuana Lopez. 2011. Performing blackness, forming whiteness: Linguistic minstrelsy in Hollywood film. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15(5). 680–706. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2011.00513.x.

Dinkin, Aaron J. 2022. Generational Phases: Toward the Low-Back Merger in Cooperstown, New York. *Journal of English Linguistics* 50(3). 219–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/00754242221108411.

Eckert, Penelope. 1988. Adolescent social structure and the spread of linguistic change. *Language in society*. Cambridge University Press 17(2). 183–207.

Engman, Mel M. & Kendall A. King. 2016. *Language Shift and Sustainability*. (Ed.) Ofelia García, Nelson Flores & Massimiliano Spotti. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190212896.013.2.

Greenhill, Simon J, Hannah J Haynie, Robert M Ross & Angela M Chira. 2023. A recent northern origin for the Uto-Aztecan family. *Language* 99(1).

Labov, William. 1964. Phonological Correlates of Social Stratification. *American Anthropologist* 66(6_PART2). 164–176. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1964.66.suppl_3.02a00120.

Nichols, Patricia. 2004. Creole languages: forging new identities. In Edward Finegan & John R. Rickford (eds.), *Language in the USA*, 133–152. 1st edn. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809880.010.

Poplack, Shana. 1980. Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish y termino en Español: toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics* 18(7–8). 581–618.

Poplack, Shana. 2013. Introductory comments by the author. *Linguistics* 51(s1). 11–14.

Silver, Shirley & Wick R Miller. 1998. *American Indian Languages Cultural and Social Contexts*. University of Arizona Press. http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=28381551. (22 April, 2022).