

Short Paper Instructions: Variety Profile

LING 140: Language in the US

Spring 2024

In this assignment, you will 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. You can submit this kind of paper for any section of this course—"Variation", "Power", or "Histories"—and should spend some time on themes relevant to the relevant section of the course. As always, there is no minimum or maximum length, but I expect about 500-750 words (2-3 double-spaced pages).

The language you choose can be any language indigenous to any part of the US (including current and former overseas territories). It can also be a dialect of a language from another place that is characteristically spoken/signed in some part of the US: Pennsylvania German and Cajun French both work, but German or French in general would not. Your paper should include the following sections:

1. **Introduction:** About one paragraph. What name(s) are used to refer to the language and what language family does it belong to? Summarize what you will be saying in the subsequent sections.
2. **Speakers:** About two paragraphs. How many speakers are there, where they live today, where they historically lived. Briefly summarize the vitality/endangerment of the language.
3. **A Linguistic Feature:** 1-3 paragraphs. Describe a feature of the phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, or semantics of the language that you find interesting. Feel free to ask Chris about how to do this. In general, you'll want to describe the phenomenon, give a few examples, and briefly explain why it's interesting or unusual.

As well as a fourth section of about a page in length depending on the section of the course:

- **Varieties (for "Variation"):** discuss the different forms of the language. This could be regional dialects, other sociolects, stylistic or register differences, or something else. If

its speakers often speak other languages or dialects, discuss that. If there isn't much variation within the language, say that, and discuss its relationship to other languages.

- **Status (for “Power”):** Does the language have official status in any state, territory, or reservation? In what domains (areas of life) is it used? What factors either threaten the continued use of the language in the future, or contribute to its future vitality?
- **History (for “Histories”):** Where did the language come from? What migrations did its speakers participate in? What changes in the linguistic structure distinguish this variety from related varieties? Optionally, you can also refer to [WALS](#) to place some aspect of the linguistic structure in a typological or areal context.

Resources you may find helpful:

- [Glottolog](#), [Ethnologue](#), and the [UNESCO World Atlas of Languages](#).
- A [Scholarly Grammar](#) of the language.

Grading Rubric

You will be graded according to the following criteria:

A successful Variety Profile will...

- ... follow a clear, organized structure
- ... present relevant information in a “Speakers” section (see above)
- ... present a linguistic feature with illustrative examples
- ... discuss the varieties/status/history of the language (see above)
- ... appropriately use in-text citations and bibliography

For each of these points, the paper will be rated “2” if it succeeds in this area, “1” if it partially succeeds, and “0” if it does not succeed. Rewrites are welcome and re-graded.