

LING-GA 1510: Sociolinguistics

Course Information

1. Logistics

Time Wed. 9:30am–12:15pm (we will take a break in the middle!)
Location 10 Washington Pl. Rm. 103

Instructors Dr. Laurel MacKenzie
Contact laurel.mackenzie@nyu.edu
Office 10 Washington Pl. Rm. 305
Office hour By appointment

2. Course description

This course is an introduction to the theory, methods, and central concerns of sociolinguistics, the study of the relationship between language and society. Our focus will be on the social correlates of language variation and change. By reading and discussing classic and contemporary papers in the field, we will address a number of fundamental questions about how language varies and changes: across speaker groups, within individuals, and over time. Emphasis will be placed on exposing students to topics of current interest and active debate in sociolinguistic research, with the aim of preparing students to contribute to the field.

The readings and discussions in this course will assume some prior exposure to linguistics. Students without this background are welcome to enroll, and will be offered supplementary reading to catch up.

3. Learning objectives

Through successfully completing this course, students will

- become familiar with social correlates of variation and change in language.
- gain broad exposure to the theories, frameworks and methods in the field of sociolinguistics, including: dialectology, language contact, multilingualism, speech community, communities of practice, register, style, inter and intra-speaker variation, identity, ethnography, data collection, cognitive and internal constraints, statistical methods, fine-grained variationist analysis.
- collect, analyze, and write about sociolinguistic data.
- be able to discuss matters of sociolinguistic variation with scientific rigor and cultural sensitivity.
- be able to develop research questions of interest to sociolinguistic theory and contribute original research to the field.

4. Course materials

Everything you will need for the course will be linked from this syllabus document. I recommend that you make a shortcut to this document on your own Google Drive by doing File > Add shortcut to Drive. Then organize it somewhere where you can easily find it each time we meet.

Access to course materials is restricted to NYU Google accounts. If you're told that you "do not have permission" to access some course material, you are likely logged in through a personal Google account. Switch to your NYU account and try again.

5. Requirements

- **Readings, annotations, and participation (20%).** All participants are expected to do the assigned reading (before class) and to participate in discussion of the material in class. You are also expected to annotate the readings with questions/comments/complaints as you read them — at least one annotation per class session. **These annotations must be posted at least 24 hrs before class begins** (so, by Tuesday morning). *Note: In the week when you are responsible for presenting an article (see below), you are off the hook for leaving annotations! But please do still read the other paper(s) for that week.*

We will attempt to use Adobe's Share PDF feature for annotating readings. On a desktop, it doesn't require any special software or logging in (though please identify yourself when you comment). On a mobile device, you'll need the (free) Adobe Acrobat app, and you'll need to log in with your NYU/Google account to comment. **Please access the readings through the syllabus links in this document** so that you access the commenting interface.

- **Article presentation/discussion leading (20%).** The papers marked on the syllabus with an asterisk (*) are available for student presentation/discussion leading. Each student will select and lead discussion of one of these papers. Discussion leaders should prepare a handout (digital is fine) with summary points and discussion questions. Discussion leaders should also incorporate their classmates' comments and questions into their presentation. As the discussion leader, your job will be to summarize and contextualize the article; to critically evaluate the authors' claims and evidence; and to facilitate discussion by posing questions, identifying avenues of further research, and addressing your classmates' annotations. Aim to take up 45 min. – 1 hour.
- **Assignments (60%).** Three assignments will be due throughout the semester, as follows:
 - Assignment 1: Sociolinguistic interview and report, due Fri. Feb. 6
 - Assignment 2: Quantitative study of a sociolinguistic variable, due Fri. Mar. 27
 - **Mandatory:** A short meeting with Laurel outside of class to get your topic approved, sometime before Fri. Feb. 27.
 - Assignment 3: Term paper, due Fri. May 1
 - **Mandatory:** A short meeting with Laurel outside of class to get your topic approved, sometime before Fri. Apr. 17.

6. Schedule

Week	Class topics and readings
1 1/21	<p>Introduction: Perspectives and approaches to the study of language in society</p> <p>For students with no prior background in linguistics: Perlin 2024 ch. 4, Wolfram & Schilling 2016 §3.3–3.4 (<i>Note that the examples in Wolfram & Schilling are specific to English, but the general concepts pertain to all languages.</i>)</p> <p>All students: Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog 1968 §0, §3.4–3.5; Fruehwald 2022 §27.1–§27.2; Eckert 2012; Fishman 1972; Gumperz 1981</p> <p>Optional, for students with interests in phonology: The rest of Fruehwald 2022</p> <p>Optional, for students with interests in syntax: Adger et al. to appear (not as long as it looks!)</p>
2 1/28	<p>Sociolinguistic methodology: Data collection, research ethics, data analysis</p> <p>Tagliamonte 2006 ch. 1–4 Bayley 2013</p>
3 2/4	<p>The sociolinguistic variable</p> <p>Cheshire 2005* Dinkin 2016*</p> <p>(Assignment 1 due Fri. of this week!)</p>
4 2/11	<p>Language and social organization: Speech community, social class, social networks, communities of practice</p> <p>Guy 2011 Milroy & Milroy 1992</p> <p><i>Note: Try not to get too bogged down in the details of Milroy & Milroy, which I find kind of vague and hard to grasp – just try to get the main points. We can go through the details of their Belfast study (which is interesting but not well explained in this paper) in class.</i></p> <p>Bucholtz 1999 up to “Identity practices in a local nerd community” (p. 213) (though the rest of the paper is a fun and easy read about nerds – recommended!)</p> <p>Time to discuss Assignment 1 (/2?)</p>
5 2/18	<p>Language and social organization: Community norm formation, standardization</p> <p>Otheguy et al. 2007* Bleaman 2022*</p>
6 2/25	<p>Language, time, and age: Real time, apparent time, age-grading, lifespan change</p> <p>Tagliamonte & D’Arcy 2009 §1–3 Wagner 2012 Sankoff 2019*</p> <p>(Assignment 2 topic must be approved by Fri. of this week!)</p>

Week	Class topics and readings
7 3/4	Language, time, and age: Actuation of change in childhood, incrementation of change in adolescence Moyna & Sanz-Sánchez 2023* Holmes-Elliott 2021* Time to discuss Assignment 2 progress
8 3/11	Language and gender: Foundational approaches Gal 1978 Eckert 1989 Time to discuss Assignment 2 progress
3/18	Spring break! Class will not meet!
9 3/25	Language and gender: Trans and nonbinary perspectives Zimman 2017* Calder & Steele 2024* Time to discuss Assignment 2 findings <i>(Assignment 2 due Fri. of this week!)</i>
10 4/1	Language and style: Accommodation, audience design, speaker design Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994 Coupland 1985 Sharma 2018
11 4/8	Indexicality and social meaning Johnstone & Kiesling 2008* Acton 2019*
12 4/15	Sociolinguistic perception & cognition Lambert et al. 1960 Labov et al. 2011 up to “Experiment 3” (p. 443) Campbell-Kibler 2016 up to “Sociolinguistic cognition is a kind of cognition” (p. 134) <i>(Assignment 3 topic must be approved by Fri. of this week!)</i>
13 4/22	Language and ethnicity Benor 2010* King 2021* Time to discuss Assignment 3 progress
14 4/29	Language loss and revitalization Jamieson 2020* Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2021* Time to discuss Assignment 3 progress <i>(Assignment 3 due Fri. of this week!)</i>

Bibliography

- Acton, Eric K. 2019. Pragmatics and the social life of the English definite article. *Language* 95:37–65.
- Adger, David, E Jamieson, and Jennifer Smith. To appear. Sociolinguistics and minimalist syntax. In *The Cambridge Handbook of the Minimalist Program*, ed. Kleanthes K. Grohmann and Evelina Leivada. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bayley, Robert. 2013. The quantitative paradigm. In *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, ed. J.K. Chambers and Natalie Schilling, 85–107. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Benor, Sarah Bunin. 2010. Ethnolinguistic repertoire: Shifting the analytic focus in language and ethnicity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14:159–183.
- Bleaman, Isaac L. 2022. Minority language maintenance and the production-prescription interface: Number agreement in New York Yiddish. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 26:221–245.
- Bucholtz, Mary. 1999. Why be normal? Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. *Language in Society* 28:203–223.
- Calder, J., and Ariana Steele. 2024. Interrogating the cisgender listening subject in the study of trans voices. *Gender and Language* 18:216–239.
- Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2016. Towards a cognitively realistic model of meaningful sociolinguistic variation. In *Awareness and Control in Sociolinguistic Research*, ed. Anna Babel, 123–151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheshire, Jenny. 2005. Syntactic variation and beyond: Gender and social class variation in the use of discourse-new markers. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 9:479–508.
- Coupland, Nikolas. 1985. “Hark, hark, the lark”: Social motivations for phonological style-shifting. *Language & Communication* 5:153–171.
- Dinkin, Aaron J. 2016. Variant-centered variation and the *like* conspiracy. *Linguistic Variation* 16:221–246.
- Eckert, Penelope. 1989. The whole woman: Sex and gender differences in variation. *Language Variation and Change* 1:245–267.
- Eckert, Penelope. 2012. Three waves of variation study: The emergence of meaning in the study of sociolinguistic variation. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41:87–100.
- Fishman, Joshua A. 1972. The sociology of language. In *The Sociology of Language: An Interdisciplinary Social Science Approach to Language in Society*, 1–7. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Fruehwald, Josef. 2022. The study of variation. In *The Oxford History of Phonology*, ed. B. Elan Dresher and Harry van der Hulst, 569–590. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gal, Susan. 1978. Peasant men can’t get wives: Language change and sex roles in a bilingual community. *Language in Society* 7:1–16.
- Gumperz, John J. 1981. The linguistic bases of communicative competence. In *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk [Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1981]*, ed. Deborah Tannen, 323–34. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Guy, Gregory R. 2011. Language, social class, and status. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Rajend Mesthrie, 159–185. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes-Elliott, Sophie. 2021. Calibrate to innovate: Community age vectors and the real time incrementation of language change. *Language in Society* 50:441–474.
- Jamieson, E. 2020. Viewing dialect change through acceptability judgments: A case study in Shetland dialect. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 5:19.

- Johnstone, Barbara, and Scott F. Kiesling. 2008. Indexicality and experience: Exploring the meanings of /aw/-monophthongization in Pittsburgh. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12:5–33.
- King, Sharese. 2021. Rethinking race and place: The role of persona in sound change reversal. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 25:159–178.
- Labov, William, Sharon Ash, Maya Ravindranath, Tracey Weldon, Maciej Baranowski, and Naomi Nagy. 2011. Properties of the sociolinguistic monitor. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15:431–463.
- Lambert, Wallace E., Richard C. Hodgson, Robert C. Gardner, and Samuel Fillenbaum. 1960. Evaluational reactions to spoken languages. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 60:44.
- Milroy, Lesley, and James Milroy. 1992. Social network and social class: Toward an integrated sociolinguistic model. *Language in Society* 21:1–26.
- Moyna, María Irene, and Israel Sanz-Sánchez. 2023. Out of the mouths of babes: Children and the formation of the Río de la Plata Spanish address system. *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 9:189–220.
- Otheguy, Ricardo, Ana Celia Zentella, and David Livert. 2007. Language and dialect contact in Spanish in New York: Toward the formation of a speech community. *Language* 83:770–802.
- Perlin, Ross. 2024. *Language City: The Fight to Preserve Endangered Mother Tongues in New York*. New York, NY: Grove Atlantic.
- Rickford, John R., and Faye McNair-Knox. 1994. Addressee- and topic- influenced style shift: A quantitative sociolinguistic study. In *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*, ed. Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan, 235–276. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rodríguez-Ordóñez, Itxaso. 2021. The role of social meaning in contact-induced variation among new speakers of Basque. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 25:533–556.
- Sankoff, Gillian. 2019. Language change across the lifespan: Three trajectory types. *Language* 95:197–229.
- Sharma, Devyani. 2018. Style dominance: Attention, audience, and the ‘real me’. *Language in Society* 47:1–31.
- Tagliamonte, Sali A. 2006. *Analysing Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tagliamonte, Sali, and Alexandra D'Arcy. 2009. Peaks beyond phonology: Adolescence, incrementation, and language change. *Language* 85:58–108.
- Wagner, Suzanne Evans. 2012. Age grading in sociolinguistic theory. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6:371–382.
- Weinreich, Uriel, William Labov, and Marvin Herzog. 1968. *Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Wolfram, Walt, and Ralph W. Fasold. 1974. Field methods in the study of social dialects. In *The Study of Social Dialects in American English*, 36–72. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling. 2016. *American English: Dialects and Variation*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, third edition.
- Zimman, Lal. 2017. Gender as stylistic bricolage: Transmasculine voices and the relationship between fundamental frequency and /s/. *Language in Society* 46:339–370.