



English 4720: American Dialects

Summer 1 2005, Section 20057: MTWR 12:00-1:40 p.m. in 2209 Dunbar

Instructor: Dr. Lisa Minnick

Office: 718 Sprau

Office hours: MW 1:45-3:00 p.m. and by appointment

Email: lisa.minnick@wmich.edu (preferred mode of contact)

Course Page: <http://www.retroflexive.com/4720main>

From the catalog: English 4720 is study of regional and social varieties of American English from sociolinguistic perspectives, focusing on the forces that influence different types of language variation. Examines issues of linguistic bias and offers a multi-cultural perspective on the role of language in daily life.

Course description, purpose, and objectives: In this course, we will discuss the theories and practices of language variation research, particularly as applied to American English. In doing so, we will consider different approaches to the study of language variation, with attention to key figures, studies, and methodologies. We will discuss the functions and effects of dialectal variation, and how factors such as region, ethnicity, gender, social status and other extralinguistic variables interact with language and contribute to variation. We will also explore how popular perceptions and attitudes contribute to the differential valuation of American English varieties, and the effects of these valuations, along with what a study of dialects can contribute to education and approaches to literacy. Finally, students will learn the skills and practices of linguistic research and language description and will have the opportunity to apply these skills to their own dialect research projects.

Texts: Finegan and Rickford, *Language in the U.S.A.* and **course pack** (at the bookstore west of campus).

Assignments and grading:

Final exam	25%
Midterm exam	20%
Critical analysis	15%
Collaborative project	15%
Homework, activities, quizzes	10%
Presentation	10%
Attendance and participation	5%

Exams: The midterm will include everything covered during the first half of the semester and the final will cover the second half as well as important earlier material. Each exam will include phonetic transcriptions, identifications and terminology, and other questions covering lecture, discussion, and reading materials.

Critical analysis: This assignment is a written review of a scholarly article from *American Speech* or other major language variation journal. You will be expected to produce a 4-5 page review, formatted and written to journal-article specifications and quality, as appropriate at the advanced-undergraduate level.

Collaborative project: Working in small groups, you will have the opportunity to conduct your own language-variation study, to gather and analyze linguistic data, and to present the results in a short paper (4-5 pp.) in journal-article format. We will discuss this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, carry out the research, and analyze the results.

Exercises and quizzes will help keep you on track and up to date. Learning the discipline of linguistics is a cumulative process. Gaps in your knowledge early on can cause problems later.

Presentation: Each student will present researched and textual materials and lead the class in discussion of these materials. We'll set up a schedule for these early in the semester.

Attendance and participation: I think that English 4720 is a fun and interesting course, but it requires a solid set of skills and base of knowledge that you will have to master early on, and therefore active participation is a must. This means you need to be present every day to the extent that it is humanly possible. Readings, discussions, and activities complement each other. If you must miss class, my policy is to permit three "freebie" absences. By "freebie," I mean that I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. I also mean that's all you get. Exceptions can only be made in cases of serious illness (such as those requiring hospitalization) and other documentable emergencies. If you miss more than three class meetings, there may be a substantial deduction in your course grade. Minimal absences reflect favorably. Excessive absences don't; and five or more may result in a course grade of F.

Course Policies

Academic honesty: All work you turn in for this class must be your own, with all outside reference sources properly cited and acknowledged. Plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, any kind of falsification or forgery, computer misuse, multiple submission, complicity, and any other type of academic dishonesty on any exams or work assigned for this course, will not be tolerated in any form. You are required to read and comply fully with the policies and definitions outlined in the Western Michigan University statement on academic integrity, which is available in the undergraduate and graduate student catalogs as well as online at <http://www.osc.wmich.edu/academicintegrity/catalog.html/>. If there is reason to believe any student has been involved in academic dishonesty, he or she will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. The student will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s) and have the opportunity for a hearing. Please consult with me if you are in doubt about how to cite a source in your paper, whether a source is appropriate, whether a citation is needed, if you are not sure what level of help on an assignment constitutes collusion, or with any other academic integrity questions. As I am also required to uphold the standards of academic integrity, my policy is zero tolerance for any type of deception, and I do not want for any of you to find out the hard way how seriously I take this.

Students with disabilities should contact Ms. Beth Denhartigh at the beginning of the semester at 387-2116 or by email at beth.denhartigh@wmich.edu so that any physical, learning, vision, hearing, psychiatric or other disability can be documented and accommodations arranged. Please note that a disability determination must be made by Ms. Denhartigh's office before accommodations can be made.

Late work is generally frowned upon in college and elsewhere, and this class is no exception. Arrangements should be made in advance (and you'll need a documentable explanation). Unexplained late work (or excuses after the fact) will not be accepted and a grade of zero will be assessed for the assignment.

Being late to class should never happen. Of course, we all have our moments, and infrequent lapses may occur. Overall, however, make it a habit to be in class on time. Otherwise, you risk missing important course content (such as instructions or quizzes) which may be over by the time you get there. Keep in mind that when you walk in late, it is distracting to other students. The same goes for leaving early. It is your responsibility to stay on top of what goes on in class whether you are there or not. If you are late, it is your responsibility to stay after class to make sure you have been marked present. **Absences resulting from uncorrected lates count towards your three allotted absences. Habitual lateness will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation score and hence your course grade. Leaving at the break will be recorded as an absence.**

Makeups: Daily assignments, exercises, quizzes, presentations, and in-class activities cannot be made up if missed because of lateness or absence. Makeups on major assignments, such as exams or papers, must be arranged with me in advance of due dates in order to avoid penalties, and you will have to make a pretty strong case in order to be granted an extension.

Classroom etiquette: You are not required to agree with everything you read or everything that is said during discussions in this class. You are encouraged to read and think critically. An open dialogue is encouraged, and all thoughtful contributions are welcome. I ask only that everyone be respectful during class discussions. The goal is for our classroom to be safe places for flexing your intellectual muscles, where everyone feels comfortable generating, expressing, and challenging ideas. Your help in reaching this goal is essential. Also,

please familiarize yourself with and be prepared to abide by WMU's code of student conduct at <<http://www.osc.wmich.edu/studentcode/conduct.html>>. Students who are not willing or able to respect the rights of everyone to a comfortable teaching and learning environment will be asked to leave.

Other etiquette and classroom civility issues: Sleeping, eating, grooming, reading non-course materials, doing homework, having conversations, **using any kind of electronic communication device**, and other such activities are discouraged because of their disruptive and impolite nature, and also because they keep you from fully participating. Your active participation is part of your course grade, of course, and also, nothing interesting will happen in class without your input. That is, the class will be as interesting as you make it. Showing up on time and prepared (that means completing all reading assignments and other homework and being ready to work when you get here) will help your grade as well as enhance your learning experience.

Formatting for all written assignments: All hard copies of assignments must be word-processed (typed) and double-spaced, including papers and written homework assignments. All papers must have 1" margins and follow MLA style for page headings, page numbering, formatting and documentation. For formal papers, I prefer Times New Roman 12 or a comparably sized sans serif font (like Arial), if you prefer.

Electronic copies of assignments will not be accepted in lieu of hard copies. Plan ahead to make sure your printing needs can be met in time for due dates. Graded assignments, papers, and exams will generally be returned within one to two weeks.

If you would like extra help with course material, you are always welcome in my office. Drop by during my office hours (MW 1:45-3:00 p.m.), or make arrangements with me if you are not free during office hours so that we can set up a time to meet. Email any time if you have questions or concerns. During the week, I will usually respond within 24 hours; on weekends, it may be Monday morning before I am able to respond.

Workload: The workload for this course is substantial, with challenging (and plentiful) reading and written assignments. You will need to keep up with all readings and other deadlines as assigned in order to be fully prepared to participate in class discussions. ***In the Summer version of the course, we will complete the same amount of material that we would normally complete in a 15-week semester, only in half the time. Please be prepared to work every day to keep on top of things.***

A word to the wise: Failure to follow directions is one of my two pet peeves; the other is failure to listen or read carefully when instructions are being given. The first is almost always a result of the second. Points will be deducted from work that does not properly respond to all requirements of the assignment. If you are ever not completely clear on what is being asked of you, please check with me either in person or via email.

Grading criteria for all assignments: Please note that this is a **4000-level course** and thus **not** an introductory course in college-level research and writing. I therefore expect students to be sufficiently prepared to complete all work according to advanced-undergraduate standards. The subject matter specific to this course may be new to you—that is what you are here to learn, after all—but I expect all students to have sufficient skills in reading, research, and writing to succeed at the 4000 level.

A	= 4.0 points awarded for excellence (not merely good work or effort).
BA	= 3.5 points
B	= 3.0 points
CB	= 2.5 points
C	= 2 points
DC	= 1.5 points
D	= 1 point
F	= 0 points for work not turned in; .5 for work that does not meet minimum standards.

At any time during the semester, you are encouraged to stop by during office hours (or make an appointment) to discuss your progress in the course.

Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

I reserve the right to make minor adjustments or massive changes to this syllabus as a result of interference from reality. Also, additional activities and readings may be assigned in class. If you come to class every day and follow along with any announced changes, you'll never be out of the loop. You are also encouraged to check our class updates page <<http://www.retroflexive.com/4720updates>> regularly for news, schedule changes, and announcements. Class lectures and discussions will not be linear recapitulations of readings; lectures and readings complement each other. Therefore, you will be expected to **come to class having read all assignments in advance of class discussions** so that you can participate fully.

Week 1: Introduction to course; what is language variation? intro to phonetics and phonology.

Mon, May 02

- Approaches to the study of language variation.
- Why dialects exist.

Tues, May 03: For Tuesday's class meeting, read Foreword to *Language in the USA*.

- What every student of the English language needs to know about linguistics.
- Linguistic and independent variables.

Wed, May 04: Read online library reserve article: Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English."

- Places and manners of sound articulation.
- Fun with IPA: Learning phonetic transcription.

Thurs, May 05: No reading assignment: work on IPA transcription homework, due Monday 5/9.

- Continue work on IPA and articulatory phonetics.

Week 2: Influences on variation; regional and social variation in American English.

Mon, May 09: **IPA homework due at class time.** Also, read *USA* Ch. 1, "American English: Its Origins and History."

- The diversity of American English.

Tues, May 10: Read *USA* Ch. 3: "Regional Dialects."

- Language variation and geography.
- Critical analysis assigned (due Tuesday, June 07, at class time)

Wed, May 11: Read *USA* Ch. 4: "Social Varieties of American English."

- Social and ethnic variation.
- Independent variables and how they interact.

Thurs, May 12: Bring in your *American Speech* article for discussion of critical analysis assignment.

- Discuss critical analysis articles.
- Review articulatory phonetics and practice transcription; review for quiz Monday, May 16.

Week 3: Language attitudes, variation, and the South.

Mon, May 16: **Quiz on articulatory phonetics and IPA.**

Tues, May 17: Read *USA* Ch. 26: "Language Attitudes to Speech."

- Perceptual dialectology and language attitudes.
- The linguistically compelling South.

Wed, May 18: Read Lippi-Green, "Hillbillies, Rednecks, and Southern Belles," in course pack.

- More on perceptual dialectology.
- More on language and the South.

Thurs, May 19

- Complete discussion of language attitudes and Southern U.S. English.
- Collaborative projects assigned (due Tuesday, June 21).

Week 4: Language in the African American community; midterm exam.

Mon, May 23: Read *USA* Ch. 5: "African American English."

- African American English, features and history.

Tues, May 24: Read *USA* Ch. 16: "Ebonics and Its Controversy."

- The Oakland Resolution; AAE in the classroom and beyond.

Wed, May 25: Read Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English," in course pack.

- Complete discussion of AAE.
- Review for midterm.

Thurs, May 26: **Midterm Exam**

Week 5: Stylistic variation; language and gender.

Mon, May 30 No class! Memorial Day observed.

Tues, May 31: Last day to withdraw from course. Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style," in course pack.

- Stylistic and intraspeaker variation.

Wed, June 01: Read *USA* Ch 22: "Language, Gender, and Sexuality."

- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.

Thurs, June 02: Read Holmes, "Women's Talk: The Question of Sociolinguistic Universals," in course pack.

- Other approaches to language and gender.

Week 6: Finish language and gender; critical analysis papers due; work on collaborative projects.

Mon, June 06: Read Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, "Communities of Practice: Where Language, Gender, and Power All Live," and Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity," in course pack.

- Other ways of thinking about language and gender.
- Seeing for ourselves: language and gender class activity.

Tues, June 07: **Critical analysis papers due at class time.**

- Report on critical analysis papers.

Wed, June 08

- Finish reports on critical analysis papers.

Thurs, June 09

- Developing and articulating research questions and methodologies for collaborative projects.
- Gathering and analyzing data.

Week 7: Language variation in the Midwest; the Northern Cities Shift

Mon, June 13: Online readings on the Northern Cities Shift, assigned in class and posted on updates page.

- What is the Northern Cities Shift?
- Listening for the shift.

Tues, June 14

- Working with NCS features.

Wed, June 15

- Work on collaborative projects.

Thurs, June 16

- Work on collaborative projects.

Week 8: Last week of class!

Mon, June 20: **Collaborative projects due at class time.**

Tues, June 21: Final thoughts; review for final exam

Wed, June 22: Final exam