



English 4720: American Dialects

Fall 2006

Section 42608: MW 12:00-1:50 p.m. in 2209 Dunbar
 Section 42617: MW 2:00-3:50 p.m. in 2209 Dunbar

Instructor: Dr. Lisa Minnick

Office: 923 Sprau

Office hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:30 p.m. and by appointment

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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 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 online library reserve readings, as assigned.

Assignments and grading:

First exam	15%
Second exam	15%
Final exam	20%
Collaborative project	20%
Working-group presentation	10%
Working-group activities	10%
Attendance and participation	10%

Grading criteria for all assignments: This is a **4000-level course** and therefore I 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 you should come in with well developed study habits and sufficient skills in reading, analysis, research, and writing to succeed at the 4000 level. If you have concerns or questions about these requirements, please come to office hours or make an appointment to meet with me early in the semester.

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-.5 for work that does not meet minimum standards; 0 points for work not turned in

All assignments must be completed in order to earn a passing grade in English 4720.

Exams: The first exam will include all material covered during Weeks 1-4, while the second will cover Weeks 5-8. All exams will include phonetic transcriptions, identifications and terminology, and other questions covering lecture, discussion, and reading materials. The final exam is cumulative in order to ensure that you complete English 4720 with a thorough knowledge of the field of language variation.

Collaborative project: Working in small groups, you will design and conduct your own original language-variation study, gathering and analyzing linguistic data. Each group will present its results in an 8-10 page paper, in journal-article format. We will discuss and work on this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, carry out your research, and analyze your results. This project is an opportunity for you to apply the material you learn in class in a hands-on, experiential way.

Homework, working-group and other class activities, and quizzes will give you opportunities for hands-on experience in language variation methods and practices. They'll also help keep you on track and up to date.

Working-group presentation: Each student will be assigned to a working group for presentations, class activities, and the collaborative project. For the presentation, each working group will work collaboratively to present a scholarly article from *American Speech* or other major language variation journal to the class and lead a discussion on the article. (Please check with me before proceeding if you decide not to use *American Speech*). I will provide you with guidelines regarding our objectives for this assignment, and we'll set up a schedule for these presentations 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. It is each student's responsibility to stay on top of all course material and assignments when a class meeting is missed. Leaving at the break will be considered an absence.

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.

Attendance policy: see previous page, **Attendance and Participation** section.

Being late to class should be avoided. Students who are not in class on time 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 someone walks in late, it is distracting to other students and the instructor. The same goes for leaving early. If you are late, I recommend that you 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, presentations, or papers, must be arranged with me in advance of due dates in order to avoid penalties, and students 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, surfing the web on your laptop, **using any kind of electronic communication device**, and other such activities are prohibited because of their disruptive and impolite nature, and because they keep students 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.

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 (Tuesday 3:00-4:30 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 a few days before I am able to respond.

Workload: The workload is substantial, with challenging (and plentiful) reading and written assignments. Keep up with all readings and other deadlines as assigned to be fully prepared to participate in class discussions.

A word to the wise: If you are ever not completely clear on what is being asked of you, please check with me either in person or via email.

Learning the discipline of linguistics is a cumulative process. Gaps in your knowledge early on can cause problems later.

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?

Wed, Sep 06

- Introduction to course
- What is language variation?
- Approaches to the study of language variation.

Week 2: Introduction to linguistics.

Mon, Sep 11: Come to class having read Foreword to *Language in the USA*.

- What every 4720 student needs to know about linguistics.
- Linguistic features and independent variables.
- Working groups established; presentations assigned.
- **Working-group activity #1: Your linguistic profile.**

Wed, Sep 13: Online library reserve article: Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English."

- Places and manners of sound articulation.
- The International Phonetic Alphabet.
- **IPA homework assigned (due Monday, Sept 25).**

Week 3: Articulatory phonetics and the International Phonetic Alphabet; what is American English?

Mon, Sep 18: Continue to work through Algeo and Pyle and online sources (linked at 4720updates).

- Fun with IPA: Learning phonetic transcription.
- Fun with articulatory descriptions.

Wed, Sep 20: Come to class having read *USA* Ch. 1, "American English: Its Origins and History."

- Continue work on IPA and articulatory phonetics.
- The history and diversity of American English.
- **Completed working-group activity #1 (linguistic profile) due for class discussion.**

Week 4: Regional influences on language variation; the Northern Cities Shift.

Mon, Sep 25: Come to class having read *USA* Ch. 3: "Regional Dialects" and online readings on the Northern Cities Shift, linked at 4720updates.

- **IPA homework due at class time.**
- Language variation and geography.
- What is the Northern Cities Shift?

Wed, Sep 27: Eliciting the Northern Cities Shift and collecting phonological data.

- **Working group activity #2: Analyzing the NCS.**

Week 5: Review Monday for first exam; exam Wednesday.

Mon, Oct 02: Review of material covered during Weeks 1-4; first exam to take place Wednesday, Oct 04.

Wed, Oct 04: First exam.

Week 6: Social variation; language attitudes and perceptual dialectology.

Mon, Oct 09: *USA* Ch. 4: "Social Varieties of American English."

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

Wed, Oct 11: *USA* Ch. 26: "Language Attitudes to Speech"

- Perceptual dialectology and language attitudes.
- Language attitudes and ideology.
- **Collaborative projects assigned (due Monday, Dec 04).**

Week 7: Language in the African American community.

Mon, Oct 16: *USA* Ch. 5: "African American English" and online library reserve article: Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English."

- African American English, features and history.
- The linguistic and cultural significance of AAE.

Wed, Oct 18: *USA* Ch. 16: "Ebonics and Its Controversy."

- The Ann Arbor case and the Oakland Resolution.
- AAE in the classroom and beyond.
- Bridge readers and other experimental methods.

Week 8: Stylistic variation.

Mon, Oct 23: Online library reserve article: Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

- Intraspeaker variation.
- Stylistic variation in theory and practice.

Wed, Oct 25: Continue to work through Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style." Introduction to research protocols.

- Measuring stylistic variation.
- Research questions, hypotheses, and methodologies: the structure of a linguistic field project.
- Ethical research protocols and informed consent.

Week 9: Review Monday for second exam; exam Wednesday.

Mon, Oct 30: Review material covered during Weeks 5-8 and articulatory phonetics for second exam.

Wed, Nov 01: Second exam.

Week 10: Gender as sociolinguistic variable; begin work on collaborative projects.

Mon, Nov 06: Online library reserve articles: Holmes, "Women's Talk: The Question of Sociolinguistic Universals" and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, "Communities of Practice: Where Language, Gender, and Power All Live."

- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.
- Principles of experimental design and participant selection.
- **Working group activity #3 (begin): Developing and articulating your research question.**

Wed, Nov 08: Online library reserve article: Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity."

- Other approaches to language and gender.
- Establishing project methods: How will you answer your research question / prove your hypothesis?
- Developing and refining your research proposal ideas.
- **Working group activity #4: Seeing for ourselves: language and gender.**

Week 11: Work continues on collaborative projects.

Mon, Nov 13: Meet in computer lab, location TBA.

- **Working group activity #3 (complete): Final proposals due at end of class period.**

Wed, Nov 15: Work on collaborative projects.

- Developing data collection instruments and analysis methods.
- Gathering and analyzing data.

Week 12: Work on collaborative projects Monday; Thanksgiving break Wednesday!

Mon, Nov 20: Work on collaborative projects; continue gathering and analyzing data.

Wed, Nov 22: No class! Thanksgiving break.

Week 13: Work on and discuss collaborative projects.

Mon, Nov 27: Work on collaborative projects; gathering and analyzing data.

Wed, Nov 29: No class – release time to work on collaborative projects. I will have extended office hours to consult with groups on projects.

Week 14: Last week of class! Collaborative projects due; review for final exam

Mon, Dec 04: Collaborative projects due at class time.

- Presentation of projects.

Wed, Dec 06

- Review for cumulative final exam.

Week 15: Final exam

2:00 section: Tuesday, December 12, 12:30-2:30 p.m.

12:00 section: Thursday, December 14, 2:45-4:45 p.m.