



## English 4720: American Dialects

Fall 2007

Section 44806: TR 4:00-5:50 p.m. in 2208 Dunbar

**Instructor:** Dr. Lisa Minnick

**Office:** 923 Sprau

**Office hours:** Thursdays 1-3 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 geography, 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. Finally, students will learn the skills and practices of linguistic research and language description and apply these skills to original dialect research projects. *Please note that this is an upper-division course in English linguistics, designed for English majors and minors and other interested students. While theories considered in 4720 have applications to education and other disciplines, it is not an education course nor a teaching methods course.*

**Texts:** Finegan and Rickford, *Language in the U.S.A.* Each student will also need to purchase a \$10 fee card.

### Assignments and grading:

Midterm exam	15%
Final exam	20%
Collaborative project	20%
Critical analysis paper	15%
Working-group activities	10%
IPA quiz	10%
Attendance, participation, and homework	10%

**Grading criteria for all assignments:** This is a **4000-level course in English** 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 <b>excellence</b> (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
E	= 0-.5 for work that does not meet minimum standards; 0 points for work not turned in.

**Exams:** The midterm and final exams will include phonetic transcriptions, articulatory descriptions, identifications and terminology, and questions covering lecture, discussion, and readings.

**Collaborative project:** Working in small groups, students will design and conduct an original language-variation study, gathering and analyzing linguistic data. Each group will present its results in a 6-8 page research paper, in journal-article format. We will discuss and work on this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, consult scholarly literature, 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.

**Critical analysis paper:** Each student will produce a 4-6 page paper analyzing a scholarly article from the language variation journal *American Speech*. I will provide you with guidelines regarding our objectives for this assignment, which calls on advanced (4000-level) research, organization, argumentation, and writing skills.

**Working-group activities:** Each student will be part of a working group for class activities and the collaborative project. Working-group activities are experiential activities for applying the theories and methods you're learning in class.

**Homework and quizzes** will help you apply the skills you are learning, such as IPA transcription and articulatory description, and are designed to keep you on track and up to date.

**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. You'll need to be present every day to the extent that it is humanly possible. If you must miss class, my policy is to permit up to three "freebie" absences. By "freebie," I mean that I ask no questions and 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; five or more absences may result in a course grade of E. It is each student's responsibility to stay on top of all course material and assignments when a class meeting is missed by consulting the updates page online and getting the notes from a classmate. Lectures and discussions missed cannot be made up in office hours. Leaving at the break counts as 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/or 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 online at <<http://www.osc.wmich.edu/academicintegrity/catalog.html>>. If there is reason to believe any student has been involved in academic dishonesty, s/he will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct, 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, whether a source is appropriate, whether a citation is needed, if you are not sure what level of help on an assignment might cross an ethical line, 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](mailto: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 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 they get there. 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 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 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, emailing or 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, and the class will be as interesting for you 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 arrive) will help your grade as well as enhance your learning experience.

**No recording of any kind – audio, video, photographic, or otherwise – is permitted in this class without the informed consent of all students and the instructor.** Everyone in this class has a right not to have their voices and/or likenesses recorded without their knowledge and permission, including the instructor.

**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.** Stop by during office hours or let me know you if would like to meet and we can set up a time. Email any time if you have questions or concerns. During the week, I try to respond within 24 hours to emails that need a response; on weekends, it may be a few days before I am able to get back to you. If you are ever not completely clear on what is being asked of you, please check with me.

**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 and to succeed on exams and assignments.

**Note: Learning the discipline of linguistics is a cumulative process. Gaps in your knowledge early on can cause problems later. Let me know as soon as you can if you feel like you're getting behind.**

## 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. You are 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; rather, lectures and readings complement each other. Therefore, you will be expected to **come to class having read the day's assignments in advance of class discussions** so that you can participate fully.

### Week 1: Introduction to course; what is language variation?

Tuesday, Sept 04

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

Thursday, Sept 06: 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.
- **Working-group activity #1: Your linguistic profile (due Tuesday, Sept 18).**

### Week 2: Introduction to linguistics and the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Tuesday, Sept 11: Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English."

- Places and manners of sound articulation.
- The International Phonetic Alphabet.
- **IPA homework assigned (due Thursday, Sept 20).**

Thursday, Sept 13: Continue to work through Algeo and Pyles.

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

### Week 3: What is American English? Regional influences on language variation.

Tuesday, Sep 18: 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.**

Thursday, Sep 20: Come to class having read *USA* Ch. 3: "Regional Dialects."

- **IPA homework due at class time.**
- Language variation and dialect geography.
- **Critical analysis paper assigned (due Tuesday, Nov 13).**

### Week 4: The Northern Cities Shift.

Tuesday, Sep 25: Online readings on the Northern Cities Shift, linked at 4720updates.

- What is the Northern Cities Shift?
- **Working group activity #2 (begin): Eliciting, documenting, and analyzing the NCS.**

**Week 4 continued: The Northern Cities Shift.**

Thursday, Sep 27: Eliciting, documenting, and analyzing the NCS.

- **Working group activity #2 (complete): Field reports due at end of period.**

**Week 5: IPA quiz on Tuesday. Social variation, language attitudes and perceptual dialectology.**

Tuesday, Oct 02: *USA* Ch. 4: "Social Varieties of American English." **IPA quiz.**

- **IPA quiz (beginning of class).**
- Social and ethnic variation.
- Independent variables and how they interact with language.

Thursday, Oct 04: *USA* Ch. 26: "Language Attitudes to Speech"

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

**Week 6: African American English.**

Tuesday, Oct 09: *USA* Ch. 5: "African American English."

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

Thursday, Oct 11: Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English."

- Language attitudes and AAE.

**Week 7: African American English. Review for midterm exam.**

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

- The Ann Arbor case and the Oakland Resolution.
- Bridge readers and other experimental methods.

Thursday, Oct 18: Complete discussion of AAE. Review for midterm exam.

**Week 8: Midterm exam; stylistic variation.**

**Tuesday, Oct 23: Midterm exam.**

Thursday, Oct 25: Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

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

**Week 9: Stylistic variation; language, gender, and sexuality.**

Tuesday, Oct 30: Continue to work through Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

- Style shifting and "linguistic repertoire."
- Measuring stylistic variation.

**Week 9 continued: Language, gender, and sexuality.**

Thursday, Nov 01: USA Ch. 22: "Language, Gender, and Sexuality."

- "Women's language"? The historical view.
- Language and gender and gendered language.

**Week 10: Language, gender, and sexuality. Introduction to protocols for empirical research.**

**Monday, November 5: Last date to withdraw from course (not that you'd want to).**

Tuesday, Nov 06: Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity," and Kiesling, "Dude."

- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.

Thursday, Nov 08: Handout on ethical research protocols.

- Ethical research protocols and informed consent.
- Research questions, hypotheses, and methodologies: starting a linguistic field project.
- **Working group activity #3 (begin): Developing and articulating your research question.**

**Week 11: Critical analysis papers due Monday. Continue work on collaborative projects.**

**Tuesday, Nov 13: Critical analysis papers due.**

- Principles of experimental design and participant selection.
- Continue working group activity #3: Developing and articulating your research question.

Thursday, Nov 15: Conducting original language variation research.

- Developing project methodologies to answer your research question and prove your hypothesis.
- Developing and refining your research proposal ideas.
- Developing data collection instruments and analysis methods.
- Gathering and analyzing data.
- **Working group activity #3 (complete): Developing and articulating your research question. Proposals due at end of class period.**

**Week 12: Work on collaborative projects; Thanksgiving!**

Tuesday, Nov 20: Release time for work on collaborative projects.

Thursday, Nov 22: No class! Thanksgiving day.

**Week 13: Work on collaborative projects.**

Tuesday, Nov 27-Thursday, Nov 29: Work on collaborative projects: analyzing data and preparing your article.

**Week 14: Present and discuss collaborative projects.**

Tuesday, December 04: **Collaborative projects due.** Begin presentations.

Thursday, Dec 06: Complete presentation of projects; review for final exam.

**Final exam Tuesday, December 11, 5-7 p.m.**