



Northern Cities Shift area (pbs.com)

English 4720: Language Variation in American English
Fall 2011: MW 12 noon-1:50 p.m. in 3045 Brown

Instructor: Dr. Lisa Minnick

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Office hours: Tuesdays 3:30-5:30 p.m. and by appointment

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Class blog and web resources: English4720.wordpress.com

Course description, purpose, and objectives

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.

In English 4720, 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 independent variables interact with language. We will also explore how popular perceptions and attitudes contribute to the differential valuation of American English varieties and the effects of these valuations. Students will learn key competencies associated with linguistic research and apply them to original linguistic research projects.

Learning objectives: Students who complete the course successfully will acquire the following:

- language description skills, including phonetic transcription.
- working knowledge of terminology used in the discipline of linguistics.
- understanding of the external (social) factors that affect language variation.
- understanding of the internal (linguistic) mechanisms of variation.
- awareness of language attitudes, how they are constructed, and how they function.

Required materials

Finegan and Rickford, *Language in the U.S.A.* (Cambridge, 2004) and a \$10 fee card. Also, all students will need to sign up for a WordPress account in order to access course materials and participate in our online community.

Assignments and values:

Final exam	20%
Collaborative project	20%
Midterm exam	15%
Working-group activities	15%
Quizzes	10%
Homework	10%
Attendance and participation	10%

Assignments

Exams: The midterm and final exams will include phonetic transcriptions, articulatory descriptions, identifications and terminology and will incorporate material from lectures, discussions, and readings.

Working-group activities: Each student will be part of a working group for class activities and for the final collaborative project. Working-group activities are experiential projects that explore language variation in real life and apply the theories and methods learned in class.

Collaborative project: For the final project, each working group will design and conduct an original language-variation study centered on gathering and analyzing linguistic data. Each group will present its results in a research paper or other approved medium as outlined in the assignment sheet. We will discuss and work on this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, consult scholarly literature, and carry out your research. This project is an opportunity for you to apply the material you learn in class in a hands-on, experiential way.

Quizzes: In this course, you will learn the International Phonetic Alphabet and other linguistic description skills as well as general linguistic terminology. Quizzes are opportunities to apply this knowledge as part of your preparation for the advanced instruction in English linguistics that occurs in English 4720.

Homework assignments are designed to help you acquire and develop the skills and knowledge required for proficiency in linguistics in general and language variation in particular.

Course Policies

Attendance and participation: I think this is a fun and interesting course, but it is also demanding, requiring a solid set of skills and base of knowledge that you will have to master early on, and we do a lot of in-class activities, so attendance and active participation are non-negotiable. This means you need to be present every day to the extent that it is humanly possible. Readings, discussions, and activities complement each other, so you'll need to be in class in order to participate in all components of the course. If you must miss class, my policy is to permit three "free" absences. By "free," I mean no questions asked and also 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. Excessive absenteeism will result in 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 and get the notes from a classmate following an absence. Missed classes cannot be made up in office hours or at any other time. Leaving at the break counts as an absence. Absence on working-group activity days should be avoided.

Arriving late to class and leaving early should be kept to a minimum. If you're late, you risk missing important course content which may be over by the time you get there. Also, late arrivals can be distracting to other students and the instructor. The same goes for leaving early. If you are late, please stay after class to make sure you have been marked present. Habitual lateness will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation score and hence your course grade.

Late work is generally frowned upon in college and elsewhere, and this class is no exception. Arrangements must 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.

Course Policies continued

Makeups and extensions: Quizzes and in-class assignments (such as working-group activities) cannot be made up if missed because of lateness or absence. Makeups or extensions on major assignments, such as exams or project deadlines, must be arranged with me in advance of due dates in order to avoid penalties, except in cases of (documentable) emergency. Please note that you will have to make a pretty strong case in order to be granted an extension or makeup exam.

Classroom etiquette: You are encouraged to read and think critically and of course not required or expected to agree with everything you read or hear in this class. In my experience, learning works best when an open dialogue is encouraged. All thoughtful contributions are welcome; I ask only that everyone be respectful to everyone else. The goal is for our classroom to be a safe place to flex 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 the WMU Student Code, available online at http://www.wmich.edu/conduct/docs/WMU_studentcode.pdf. Students who do not abide by the code and respect the rights of everyone to a comfortable teaching and learning environment will be asked to leave.

Other etiquette issues: Sleeping, eating, grooming, reading non-course materials, doing homework, having conversations, using any kind of electronic communications device, and other such activities are discouraged because of their disruptive and impolite nature, and because they impede full participation. Active participation is part of your grade; plus, nothing interesting will happen for you in class without your input. You have to make it happen. Students who are prepared and engaged won't be bored in this class.

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. *Note: We will use voice recording equipment in our work for English 4720, but **surreptitious recording (i.e. recording any individual without his or her knowledge) is unethical and therefore not allowed, either in our linguistic research or in any other context.***

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. My job is to help you learn this stuff, so by all means take advantage of this resource by coming to office hours, talking with me after class or during the break, or making an appointment to meet with me.

Grading criteria for all assignments:

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	= 2.0 points
DC	= 1.5 points
D	= 1.0 point
E	= .5 points for work not meeting minimum standards; 0 for work not turned in.

University Policies

Religious Observances Policy: The University is a diverse, multicultural enterprise and, as a community, we jointly embrace both individual responsibility and dignified respect for our differences. It is WMU's general policy to permit students to fulfill obligations set aside by their faith. It is the University's intent that students who must be absent from scheduled classes to fulfill religious obligations or observe practices associated with their faith not be disadvantaged. However, it is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with his/her instructors in advance. It is in the student's best interests to approach each instructor expeditiously and with sufficient notice so that the rights and responsibilities of the instructor are not disrupted. I ask to be informed early in the semester if you must miss class for religious reasons.

Students with disabilities should contact Disability Services for Students at 387-2116 so that any physical, learning, vision, hearing, or other disability can be documented and accommodations arranged. Please note that a determination must be made by the Disability Services office before accommodations can be made.

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. **All students 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.wmich.edu/conduct/academichonesty/definitionsofviolations.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 for your project, whether a source is appropriate, whether a citation is needed, if you are not sure what level of help on an assignment constitutes complicity or 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.

English 4720 Weekly Schedule

I reserve the right to make minor adjustments or massive changes to this syllabus as a result of interference from reality. Please check our class blog regularly for news and announcements (English4720.wordpress.com). Also, please note that lectures, discussions, and readings complement each other and that therefore you will need to **come to class each day having completed the assigned readings** so that you can participate fully and get the most from your experience in the course.

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

Sept 07

Wednesday, Sept 07

- Introduction to course.
- What is language variation?
- Approaches to the study of language variation.
- Course goals and objectives.

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

Sept 12-14

Monday, Sept 12: Come to class having read Foreword to *Language in the USA*.

- Terminology: the language of linguistics.
- Linguistic features and independent variables.

Wednesday, Sept 14: Come to class having read Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English."

- Places and manners of articulation.
- The International Phonetic Alphabet.

Week 3: What is American English? History and diversity of the English language in the United States.

Sept 19-21

Monday, Sept 19: Continue to work through Algeo and Pyles.

- Fun with IPA: Learning phonetic transcription.
- Understanding articulatory descriptions.
- **Begin working-group activity 1: Your linguistic profile (due Wednesday, Sept 28).**

Wednesday, Sept 21: Homework 1 due. *USA* Ch. 1.

- The history and diversity of American English.
- Continue work on IPA and articulatory phonetics.

Week 4: Regional variation and the Northern Cities Shift.

Sept 26-28

Monday, Sept 26: Quiz 1. *USA* Ch. 3 and online readings on the Northern Cities Shift, linked to our blog at English4720.wordpress.com.

- Language variation and dialect geography.
- Language variation and change in action: the Northern Cities Shift.

Wednesday, Sept 28: Working-group activity 1 (linguistic profile) due. Also, continue to work through the assigned readings on the Northern Cities Shift.

- The Northern Cities Shift.
- **Begin working-group activity 2: The Northern Cities Shift** (time permitting).

Week 5: Working-group activity 2: The Northern Cities Shift.

Oct 03-05

Monday, Oct 03: Working-group activity 2: Eliciting, documenting, and analyzing the NCS.

Wednesday, Oct 05: Working-group activity 2 (complete): Field reports due at the end of class.

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

Oct 10-12

Monday, Oct 10: Homework 2 due. *USA* Ch. 4.

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

Wednesday, Oct 12: *USA* Ch. 26.

- Perceptual dialectology and language attitudes.
- **Collaborative projects assigned (due Week 14).**

Week 7: Language variation in the African American community.

Oct 17-19

Monday, October 17: Quiz 2. *USA* Ch. 5.

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

Wednesday, October 19: Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English," and *USA* Ch. 16.

- Language attitudes and AAE.
- The Ann Arbor case and the Oakland Resolution.

Week 8: Language variation in the African American community (continued). Midterm exam.

Oct 24-26

Monday, Oct 24: Complete discussion of AAE. Review for midterm exam.

Wednesday, Oct 26: Midterm exam.

Week 9: Stylistic variation.

Oct 31-Nov 02

Monday, Oct 31: Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

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

Wednesday, Nov 02: Continue to work through Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

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

Week 10: Language, gender, and sexuality.

Nov 07-09

Monday, Nov 07, is the last day to withdraw from the course (not that you'd want to).

Monday, Nov 07: Homework 3 due. USA Ch. 22 and Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity."

- "Women's language"? Some traditional views.
- Language and gender and gendered language.

Wednesday, Nov 09: Kiesling, "Playing the Straight Man," and Bing & Bergvall, "The Question of Questions."

- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.
- Is there "gay language"?

Week 11: Protocols for ethical research and developing your research question.

Nov 14-16

Monday, Nov 14: Come to class having read 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.**

Wednesday, Nov 16: Working-group activity 3 (complete). Proposals due at the end of class.

Week 12: Continue work on collaborative projects.

Nov 21-23

Monday, Nov 21: In-class work on collaborative projects.

Wednesday, Nov 23: No class. Thanksgiving break.

Week 13: Work on collaborative projects.

Nov 28-Nov 30

Monday, Nov 28: In-class work on collaborative projects.

Wednesday, Nov 30: In-class work on collaborative projects.

Week 14: Present and discuss collaborative projects.

Dec 05-07

Monday, Dec 05: Begin project presentations.

Wednesday, Dec 07: Complete presentations; review for final exam.

**Collaborative projects are due electronically by midnight on Thursday, December 08.
See project assignment sheet for complete instructions.**

Week 15: Final exam is Tuesday, December 13, 12:30-2:30 pm
