



English 4720: American Dialects Spring 2006

Section 14424: MW 12:00-1:50 p.m. in 3207 Dunbar
 Section 14429: MW 4:00-5:50 p.m. in 3205 Dunbar

Instructor: Dr. Lisa Minnick
Office: 718 Sprau
Office hours: MW 2:00-3:00 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 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 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, 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 original dialect research projects.

Texts: Finegan and Rickford, *Language in the U.S.A.* and online library reserve readings, as assigned.

Assignments and grading:

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

Grading criteria for all assignments: This is a **4000-level course** and 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 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 points

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

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 conduct a language variation study, gather and analyze linguistic data, and present the results in a short paper (4-5 pp.) in journal-article format and in class. We will discuss this project extensively in class, and class time will be allotted for group work.

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 E. 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 recorded 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 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 constitutes an inappropriate level of help on an assignment, 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 and leaving early should be avoided. If you are not in class on time, 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 and the instructor. 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 arrive after attendance has been taken, you will need 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.**

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 safe and comfortable learning and teaching 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 to class) 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.

If you would like extra help with course material, you are always welcome in my office. Drop by during my office hours (MW 2:00-3:00 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 a few days 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.

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.

Graded assignments, papers, and exams will be returned within one to two weeks.

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 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, **please 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?

Mon, Jan 09 (4 p.m. section only – Why does the semester start at 4:00? It's a mystery.)

- Introduction to course.

Wed, Jan 11

- Introduction to course (12:00 section).
- What is language variation?
- Approaches to the study of language variation.

Week 2: Introduction to linguistics.

Mon, Jan 16: No class – MLK Day observed.

Wed, Jan 18: Come to class having read Foreword to *Language in the USA* and online library reserve article: Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English."

- What every 4720 student needs to know about linguistics.
- Linguistic and independent variables.
- Places and manners of sound articulation.

Week 3: Articulatory phonetics; influences on variation.

Mon, Jan 23: Come to class having read *USA* Ch. 1, "American English: Its Origins and History."

- Fun with IPA: Learning phonetic transcription. (IPA homework assigned – due Wed. Feb 01)
- The diversity of American English.

Wed, Jan 25: *USA* Ch. 3: "Regional Dialects."

- Continue work on IPA and articulatory phonetics.
- Language variation and geography.
- Critical analysis assigned (due Wednesday, Mar 22, at class time).

Week 4: Social variation in American English; IPA homework and *American Speech* article due.

Mon, Jan 30: *USA* Ch. 4: "Social Varieties of American English."

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

Wed, Feb 01: Bring in your *American Speech* article for discussion.

- **IPA homework due at class time.**
- Discuss critical analysis articles.
- Review articulatory phonetics and practice transcription; review for quiz Monday, Feb 06.

Week 5: Articulatory phonetics and IPA quiz; language attitudes and perceptual dialectology.

Mon, Feb 06: Quiz on articulatory phonetics and IPA.

Wed, Feb 08: *USA* Ch. 26: "Language Attitudes to Speech."

- Perceptual dialectology and language attitudes.
- Analyzing language attitudes.

Week 6: The linguistically compelling South.

Mon, Feb 13: Online library reserve article: Lippi-Green, "Hillbillies, Rednecks, and Southern Belles."

- Language attitudes and ideology.
- Language perceptions and the South.

Wed, Feb 15

- Complete discussion of language attitudes and Southern U.S. English.
- Collaborative projects assigned (due Monday, April 17).

Week 7: Language in the African American community.

Mon, Feb 20: *USA* Ch. 5: "African American English" and Ch. 16: "Ebonics and Its Controversy."

- African American English, features and history.
- The Oakland Resolution; AAE in the classroom and beyond.

Wed, Feb 22: Online library reserve article: Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English."

- The linguistic and cultural significance of AAE.
- Review for midterm.

Week 8: Spring break! No class! (Study for the midterm!)

Week 9: Midterm exam; stylistic variation.

Mon, Mar 06: Midterm exam.

Wed, Mar 08: Online library reserve article: Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

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

Week 10: Language and gender.

Mon, Mar 13: *USA* Ch 22: "Language, Gender, and Sexuality" and online library reserve article: Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity."

- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.

Wed, Mar 15: 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."

- More ways of thinking about language and gender.

Week 11: Critical analysis papers due.

Mon, Mar 20: No class – Release time and extended office hours for work on critical analysis papers.

Wed, Mar 22: **Critical analysis papers due at class time.**

- Report on critical analysis papers.

Week 12: Language variation in the Midwest and the Northern Cities Shift; work on collaborative projects.

Mon, Mar 27: Online readings on the Northern Cities Shift, assigned in class and posted on updates page.

- Finish reports on critical analysis papers, if necessary.
- What is the Northern Cities Shift?

Wed, Mar 29: More on the Northern Cities Shift; begin work on collaborative projects.

- Listening for NCS features.
- What is informed consent?
- Thinking about research questions.

Week 13: Work on collaborative projects.

Mon, Apr 03: Work on collaborative projects.

- Developing and articulating your research question and methodology.
- Designing your data collection instruments.

Wed, Apr 05: Work on collaborative projects.

- Collecting and analyzing data.

Week 14: Work on collaborative projects.

Mon, Apr 10: Work on collaborative projects.

- Collecting and analyzing your data.

Wed, Apr 12: Work on collaborative projects.

- Drawing your conclusions and writing up the results.

Week 15: Last week of class! Collaborative projects due.

Mon, Apr 17: Collaborative projects due at class time.

- Presentation of projects.

Wed, Apr 19: Last class meeting!

- Review for final exam.

Week 16: Final exam!

4:00 section: Monday, April 24, 5:00-7:00 p.m.

12:00 section: Wednesday, April 26, 2:45-4:45 p.m.