



Dialect geography 101?  
(after David Wink, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

## English 472: American Dialects

Fall 2004, Section 61916: M/W 2:00-3:50 p.m. in 4019 Brown

**Instructor:** Dr. Lisa Minnick

**Office:** 718 Sprau

**Office hours:** T/W 4-5:30 p.m. and by appointment

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**Course Page:** <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~lminnick/472main>

**From the catalog:** English 472 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 also discuss American dialects themselves, including 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 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. Students will learn the skills and practices of variation research and language description and will have the opportunity to apply their knowledge to their own dialect research projects.

### Texts:

- Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes, *American English*. Blackwell, 2001.
- Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent*, 5th ed. Thomson, 2004.
- Course pack available at the bookstore.

*Note: Additional readings and other media (film, video, etc.) may also be assigned. Stay in the loop!*

### Assignments and grading:

Final exam.....	25%
Midterm exam.....	20%
Paper/project.....	20%
Features inventory.....	10%
Exercises and quizzes.....	10%
Presentations.....	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 identifications, short answer, and short essay questions relevant to the current course material.

**Paper/project:** This assignment is an opportunity for you to conduct your own language-variation study and to present the results in journal-article format. We will discuss this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, carry out the research, and analyze the results. You may also be asked to present your findings orally to the class.

**Features inventory** (individual and collaborative components): Each student will keep a journal of linguistic features observed in the instructor's speech over the course of the semester. Towards the end of the semester, students will form small groups, combine their data, and write up a short analysis of the features they have documented. We will talk more about this in class.

**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.

**Presentations:** These will include individual and group presentations and discussion leadership on researched and textual materials. We'll set up a schedule for these early in the semester.

**Attendance and participation:** I think that English 472 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, so you 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 "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.denhartiah@wmich.edu](mailto:beth.denhartiah@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 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 or Chicago style for page headings, page numbering, formatting and documentation (we'll go over this in class). For formal essays, 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.** Graded assignments 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.** There is no need for an appointment if you would like to drop by during my office hours (Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 4:00-5:30 p.m.), but please make arrangements with me if you are not free during office hours so that we can set up a time to meet. Also, please email me 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:** I won't sugar-coat it; the workload for this course is substantial, with challenging (and plentiful) reading assignments and frequent written assignments. You will need to keep up with all readings and other deadlines as assigned because if you aren't prepared, you won't be able to participate in class discussions, which will be (1) boring for you and (2) detrimental to your progress in the course.

**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 subtracted from work which 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:**

- A = 91-100% Excellent (not merely good) work.
- BA.= 87-90%
- B = 81-86%
- CB = 77-80%
- C = 71-76%
- DC = 67-70%
- D = 60-66%
- F = 0-59% Work does not meet minimum standards.

Towards the end of the semester, you will receive a course grade sheet that breaks down exactly how your grade is being calculated, but at any time during the semester, you are welcome and 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. Also, you are encouraged to check our class updates page <<http://homepages.western.edu/~lminnick/472updates>> regularly for news, schedule changes, and announcements. Please read all assignments in advance of class discussions. Class lectures and discussions will not be linear recapitulations of readings, so it will help to have the entire week's reading complete by Monday's class meeting (except where noted below) so that you can participate fully.

### **Week 1: Introduction to course: What is Language Variation?**

Sep 01

- Approaches to the study of language variation.
- Why dialects exist.
- What every student of the English language needs to know about linguistics.

### **Week 2: What is a Dialect?; and an Introduction to Phonology**

Sep 06-08

Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, Chapter 1, and reserve article: Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English." Discussion topics:

- Facts and beliefs about dialects and variation.
- Places and manners of sound articulation.
- Fun with IPA: Learning phonetic transcription.

### **Week 3: Influences on variation. Also, continue work on IPA and places/manners of articulation.**

Sep 13-15

Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, Chapters 2 and 3. Discussion topics:

- Linguistic and extralinguistic variables.
- Review places and manners of articulation.
- Practice transcription.
- Paper/projects assigned (due Friday, November 12, at 5 p.m.)

### **Week 4: History of variation in American English and the influence of geography.**

Sep 20-22

Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, Chapters 4 and 5. Discussion topics:

- English in early America.
- The growth and diversification of American English.
- Region as extralinguistic variable.
- More fun with transcription.

### **Week 5: Geography and dialect and dialect geography.**

Sep 27-29

Read Montgomery, "Language Variety in the South," and Preston, "The South: The Touchstone," in course pack; and Lippi-Green, pp. 201-216. Discussion topics:

- The Linguistic Atlas projects.
- The linguistically compelling South.
- Perceptual dialectology and attitudes about region.

**Week 6: Social and ethnic influences on variation.**

Oct 04-06

Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, Chapter 6, and Baugh, "Linguistics, Education, and the Law" in course pack. Discussion topics:

- Social class, variation, and change.
- Problems with class as variable.
- Culture and ethnicity as extralinguistic variables.

**Week 7: Language in the African American community. Review for midterm exam.**

Oct 11-13

Read Rickford and Rickford, "The Ebonics Firestorm: Education," and "The Ebonics Firestorm: Media," in course pack. Discussion topics:

- African American English.
- Dialect and educational issues.

**Week 8: More about African American English. Midterm Exam Wednesday, October 20.**

Oct 18-20

Read Lippi-Green, pp. 176-201. Discussion topics:

- Continue and complete discussion of African American English.
- Review for midterm.
- Midterm exam Wednesday.

**Week 9: Language and Gender.**

Oct 25-27

Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, Chapter 7, and Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity," Eckert, "Gender and Sociolinguistic Variation," and Swann, "Talk Control," in course pack. Discussion topics:

- The complicated history of the study of language and gender.
- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.
- Perceptions about linguistic differences in female and male speech.

**Week 10: Complete discussion of Language and Gender; stylistic variation.**

Nov 01-03 Last date to withdraw from classes: Monday, November 1.

Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, Chapters 8 and 9. Discussion topics:

- Language and gender
- Situation as extralinguistic variable. -Distribution and patterning of features.

**Week 11: Applying variation research; dialect and media.**

Nov 08-10

Read Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, Chapters 10-11. Discussion topics:

- Why study variation? Question revisited.
- Literary and media dialect.
- More on language variation and education.
- Project papers due Friday, November 12, by 5 p.m.

**Week 12: Language contact in the United States; language and ideology.**

Nov 15-17

For Monday: read Lippi-Green, pp. 217-239, Klingler, "Colonial Society and the Development of Louisiana Creole," and Mille, "Ambrose Gonzales's Gullah," in course pack. For Wednesday: read Lippi-Green, pp. 41-73. Discussion topics:

- Creole languages and language contact.
- Louisiana Creole and Sea Island Creole (Gullah).
- Perceptions about standard speech and "accented" speech and differential valuation.
- Language, ideology, and discrimination.

**Week 13: Language variation and discrimination.**

Nov 22-24

Read Lippi-Green, pp. 77-103. Discussion topics:

- Perceptions about variation as learned behavior.
- Ideas about dialects and correctness.
- The role of media in maintaining language ideologies.

**Week 14: Last week of class! Institutionalized language ideology.**

Nov 29-Dec 01

Read Read Lippi-Green, pp. 104-170. Discussion topics:

- Language and education, media, and the law.
- The politics of American English.
- Review for final exam. December 01: last day of class.

**Week 15: Final Exam: Tuesday, December 7, 2:45-4:45 p.m. Location to be announced.**