



## English 5220: Studies in American Literature The Language of American Literature

Fall 2005, Section 43168: W 4:00-6:30 p.m. in 4002 Brown

**Instructor:** Dr. Lisa Minnick

**Office:** 718 Sprau

**Office hours:** T/Th 4:00-5:00 p.m. and by appointment

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**Course Page:** <http://www.retroflexive.com/5220main>

**Course description, purpose, and objectives:** In this section of English 5220, we will consider the relationships between linguistics and literature, exploring particularly the functions and effects of literary dialect and other literary-linguistic strategies as deployed in 19th- and 20th-century American literature. We will explore the ways that literature can add to our knowledge about linguistic variation and change among real speakers, as well as how a linguistic-analysis approach can open works of literature to new levels of interpretation. Students will have the opportunity to conduct their own analyses of literary works using electronic and other methods. Students who are creative writers are encouraged to experiment with the theories and methods of literary-linguistic analysis in relation to their own original texts.

**Texts:** Minnick, *Dialect and Dichotomy*, Alabama, 2004.

Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Norton Critical Edition is required!

**Online texts and electronic readings.** Many of the literary texts we'll use are available online for no charge.

**Fee card:** Each student is required to purchase a fee card from the bookstore to cover costs of photocopied articles and other printed material that will be provided to you in class.

### Assignments and grading:

**Grading criteria for all assignments:** Please note that this is an *advanced* undergraduate/graduate course and not a course in how to do college-level research and writing. I therefore expect undergraduate students to be sufficiently prepared to complete all work according to advanced-undergraduate standards, and for graduate students to meet graduate-level standards. The subject matter specific to this course may be new to you—that is what you are here to learn, after all—but I expect all students to have sufficient skills in reading, research, and writing to succeed at this level.

A	= 4.0 points awarded for <b>excellent, top-quality work</b> only.
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 for work not turned in; .5 for work that does not meet minimum standards.

### Assignments:

for undergraduate students		for graduate students	
Course project/paper	30%	Course project/paper	30%
Electronic journal	25%	Electronic journal	20%
Collaborative project	20%	Collaborative project	20%
Collaborative presentation	10%	Presentation	15%
Attendance and participation	15%	Attendance and participation	15%

**Course paper/project** (4-6 pp. for undergraduate students; 8-10 pp. for graduate students): This assignment is an opportunity for you to conduct your own original text-analysis study and to present the results in journal-article format, as appropriate at the advanced-undergraduate and graduate levels. The project is intended to be the product of a semester's worth of learning, with significant investments of work and time on your part, and will be graded accordingly. You will need to research, develop, draft, revise, and edit conscientiously over the assignment period in order to complete this assignment satisfactorily. We will discuss this project in class as you generate ideas, analyze your selected text(s), and compose your paper to report on your methods, data, results, and analysis.

**Electronic journal:** All students will produce electronic journal entries in response to readings and other assignments. These will be submitted electronically on a weekly basis for posting to our class web page. I will provide you with assignment specifications, information about deadlines, and instructions for how to submit your work.

**Collaborative project:** The goal of the collaborative project is to identify issues in literary text analysis studies and propose and implement methods for analysis. Students will work together in small groups in and outside of class to generate ideas, develop methods, carry out the research, write about the process in a short paper, and present your project to the class.

**Presentations** on researched and textual materials: For graduate students, this will be an individual presentation / discussion leadership. For undergraduates, this will be an opportunity to present and lead class discussion in small groups. We'll set up a schedule for these early in the semester, and specific assignment criteria will be provided.

**Attendance and participation:** English 5220 is designed to be an active, experiential course for students. Your presence, attentiveness, preparedness, and active contributions are of paramount importance both to the success of the course and to your individual success. You'll need to complete all readings and other assignments on time in order to be ready to contribute in class. Passive learning, not doing the reading, persistent failure to contribute to discussions, not participating in activities, and/or any other kind of slacking will not be suffered gladly and will affect your attendance and participation score, which counts for 15% of your course grade.

### University 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](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.

### Instructor Policies

**Attendance and preparedness:** I think that English 5220 has the potential to be a fun and stimulating course, but your active contribution to this goal is a must. This means you need to be present and fully prepared every day to the extent that it is humanly possible. Readings, discussions, and activities complement each other. Because this class meets only once a week, and because participation is a major part of your course experience and the grading criteria, *missing more than a single class meeting may be detrimental to your grade*. Leaving at the break will be recorded as an absence. Habitual lateness will also affect your attendance record.

**Late work** is generally frowned upon in college and elsewhere, and this class is no exception. Arrangements need to 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. Please make it a habit to be in class on time. Otherwise, you risk missing important course content as well as distracting other students when you walk in late. 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 as absences. Habitual lateness will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation score and hence your course grade. Leaving at the break will also be recorded as an absence.

**Makeups:** Discussions, presentations, and any other in-class activities cannot be made up if missed because of lateness or absence. Makeups on major assignments, such as 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 encouraged to read and think critically and thus you are not required to agree with everything you read or everything that is said during discussions 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 during class discussions. 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 and adhere to Western Michigan's code of student conduct at <http://www.osc.wmich.edu/studentcode/conduct.html>. Students who are not willing or able to 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 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 written assignments must be word-processed (typed) and double-spaced, following MLA or Chicago style for page headings, page numbering, formatting, and documentation. Electronic copies of assignments will not be accepted in lieu of required hard copies. Graded assignments and exams will be returned within one to two weeks.

**For extra help:** There is no need for an appointment if you would like to drop by during my office hours (T/Th 4:00-5:00 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.

**Workload:** As an advanced-level course, the English 5220 workload is substantial, with challenging (and plentiful) reading assignments and frequent written assignments. Many of the readings will be advanced and theory-oriented, which means you will need to allow yourself sufficient time to work through them, possibly more than once for some of the more difficult articles. Skimming readings a few minutes before class starts won't provide you with enough preparation to participate adequately in the class session. It should go without saying that 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 all of us) and (2) detrimental to your progress in the course.

## Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

See our class updates page at <http://www.retroflexive.com/5220updates> for news, schedule changes, and announcements. These things happen.

**Links to all online readings assigned will be provided on our class web pages.**

### Week 1: Introduction to course: Linguistic applications to literature

Aug 31

- Approaches to the study of literary linguistics.
- Literary dialect.
- Stylistics, discourse and pragmatics.
- Computational and corpus linguistics.

### Week 2: Dialect literature in American English

Sept 07

For class, read:

1. Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Dialect and Dichotomy* and the following online texts:
2. A.B. Longstreet, "An Interesting Interview," from *Georgia Scenes* (1835), available online at Documenting the American South (linked from our web page).
3. T.B. Thorpe, Preface and "The Big Bear of Arkansas," from *The Hive of the Bee Hunter* (1854), available online at Documenting the American South.

Discussion topics:

- Linguistic terminology and areas of inquiry.
- Literary dialect and features-level analysis.
- Dialect writing in English.
- Dialect humor in 19th-century America.

### Week 3: Discourse- and pragmatic-level analysis

Sept 14

For class, read:

1. Chapters 2 and 3 in *Dialect and Dichotomy*
2. Lamont Antieau, "Lousy Conversations and All," *Southern Journal of Linguistics*, available from the library's online reserve.
3. Fennell and Bennett, "Sociolinguistic Concepts and Literary Analysis," available online on JSTOR via the Western Michigan library site.
4. Stephen Crane, "The Blue Hotel" (1898), online at Documenting the American South.

Discussion topics:

- Discourse and pragmatic analysis.
- Methodologies and theoretical approaches.
- Begin work on collaborative projects (due Wednesday, October 12, at class time).

#### **Week 4: Language in the African American community**

Sept 21

For class, read (or watch, in the case of #3):

1. Lisa Green, "African American English" (online reserve).
2. Rosina Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English" (online reserve).
3. Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* (2000).

Discussion topics:

- Linguistic features of African American English.
- Media and literary representations of African American speech.
- Language attitudes and the role of media.

#### **Week 5: The "plantation tradition" in American literature**

Sept 28

For class, read:

1. Michele Birnbaum, "Dark Dialects" (online reserve).
2. Lee Pederson, "Language in the Uncle Remus Tales" (online at JSTOR).
3. Paul Laurence Dunbar, poems (TBA), online at Wright State University's Paul Laurence Dunbar Digital Text Archives.
4. Thomas Nelson Page, from *In Old Virginia* (1887) "Marse Chan: A Tale of Old Virginia," online at Documenting the American South.
5. Joel Chandler Harris, from *Uncle Remus, His Songs and Sayings* (1880), online at Project Gutenberg:

Harris's Introduction

I. Uncle Remus initiates the Little Boy

II. The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story

III. Why Mr. Possum loves Peace

Discussion topics:

- The literary contexts of the plantation tradition.
- Paul Laurence Dunbar: plantation tradition writer, or signifier?
- Page and Harris: difference in kind or in degree?

#### **Week 6: The complicated case of Charles W. Chesnutt**

Oct 05

For class, read:

1. Chesnutt, "Dave's Neckliss" (1899), online at Documenting the American South.
2. Chesnutt, "Po' Sandy," online at Documenting the American South.
3. Chesnutt, "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," online at Documenting the American South.
4. Chapter 5 in *Dialect and Dichotomy*.

Week 6 Discussion topics:

- Chesnutt and the plantation tradition.
- Chesnutt's language attitudes.
- African American English in Chesnutt's conjure stories.

**Week 7: Collaborative projects due** ■ Informal presentations of collaborative projects.  
Oct 12

**Week 8: Stylistics and literary language**

Oct 19

For class, read:

1. Roman Jakobson "Closing Statement," (online reserve)
2. Roger Fowler, "Studying Literature as Language" (online reserve)
3. Chapter 6 of *Dialect and Dichotomy*

Discussion topics:

- Theoretical approaches to stylistics.
- Language as characterization device and signifier of status.

**Week 9: What literature can reveal about language and language attitudes**

Oct 26

For class, read:

1. First half of Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* (1884)
2. Chapter 4 of *Dialect and Dichotomy*
3. Michael Ellis, "Literary Dialect as Linguistic Evidence" (JSTOR)

Discussion topics:

- Using literary material as linguistic data.
- Reconstructing earlier varieties of American English.
- Using literature alongside other linguistic data.

**Last date to withdraw from classes: Monday October 31**

**Week 10: More on what literature can reveal about language and language attitudes**

Nov 02

For class, read:

1. Finish Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*
2. William Evans, "French-English Literary Dialect in *The Grandissimes*" (JSTOR)
3. Find, read, and bring to class a scholarly article related to language in *Huckleberry Finn*

Discussion topics:

- The uneasy relationship between linguistics and literature.
- Literary applications to language studies.

**Week 11: Feminist stylistics**

Nov 09

For class, read:

1. Sara Mills, "The Gendered Sentence" (online reserve)
2. Deirdre Burton, "Through Glass Darkly: Through Dark Glasses" (online reserve)
3. Ernest Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (UVA e-text archive)
4. Gertrude Stein, short reading (specifics TBA)
5. Chapter 7 of *Dialect and Dichotomy*
6. Richard Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears," Review of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (UVA e-text archive)

Discussion topics:

- Feminist stylistics.
- Gendered literary language?
- Language and gender status within and beyond the text.

**Week 12: Discuss progress on projects; experimenting with electronic texts**

Nov 16

- Meet in computer lab, 1040 Brown; we're going to do a little experimenting.

**Week 13: No class! Thanksgiving break.**

Nov 23

**Week 14: Last meeting! Papers due at class time; finish discussions of readings; final thoughts.**

Nov 30