



Guillaume Apollinaire, *La cravate et la montre*, 1914.

**English 5220: The Language of American Literature**  
Summer 1 2009, MW 4:00-6:20 p.m. in Brown 3045

**Instructor:** Dr. Lisa Minnick

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**Office hours:** by appointment

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

**Course description, purpose, and objectives:** It is a truism that literary texts are made of linguistic elements, that they consist of units of language arranged in imaginative ways. Literary writers use linguistic structures that are, at least in the abstract, available to everyone, but to paraphrase the linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin, literary authors “do things with words” that make literature a particularly interesting form of human expression.

But the linguistic elements that literature is made of are often taken for granted, perhaps because of this very obviousness: Of course literature is made of language. And so not everyone gets around to trying to explore literary works through attention to the linguistic elements of literature, using the theories, terminology, and methods of the discipline of linguistics.

In the Language of American Literature, we will do just that: look at how language works in literary texts, applying the principles, theories, and methodologies of linguistic analysis to works of literature. Our goals will be both linguistic and literary. One of our pursuits will be to explore the ways that literature can add to our knowledge about language use among real speakers. Specifically, literary language is rich with information of interest to language scientists, on topics such as language variation and change, linguistic authority and the process of standardization, pragmatic norms and competence, and language attitudes, especially as they interact with race, gender, sexuality, class, and other independent variables. Our other key pursuit will be to inquire into the ways that linguistic approaches can open works of literature to new levels of interpretation.

To achieve these objectives, we will concentrate primarily on 19th- and 20th-century American literature as our object of investigation. We will begin by exploring the conventions of literary dialect, analyzing its artistic, linguistic, and political functions and effects both within and beyond the text. Additionally, we will develop original research questions to inquire into other ways that language is deployed in literary works, ways that go beyond direct representations of spoken language. In doing so, we will experiment with multiple theoretical and methodological approaches, including computational methods, for which instruction will be provided.

No knowledge of linguistics or computational analysis is required or presupposed (although it's always welcome).

#### **Texts:**

Minnick, L.C. (2004). *Dialect and Dichotomy: Literary Representations of African American Speech*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. Royalties from book sales will be donated to the WMU chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society.

**Fee card:** Please purchase a \$10 fee card from the bookstore to cover costs of printed material that will be provided in class.

**Online texts:** Most of the literary texts we'll use are available online for no charge.

## Assignments:

Final project/paper	30%
Midterm collaborative project	20%
Electronic journal	20%
Presentation	15%
Attendance and participation	15%

**Grading criteria for all assignments:** Please note that this is an *advanced* undergraduate/graduate course, and therefore I 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 demonstrate proficiency in critical reading, research, and writing as appropriate and as necessary to succeed at this level.

A	= 4.0 points awarded for excellent work.
BA	= 3.5 points
B	= 3.0 points
CB	= 2.5 points
C	= 2 points
DC	= 1.5 points
D	= 1 point
E	= 0 points for work not turned in; .5 for work that does not meet minimum standards.

*All assignments must be completed to earn a passing grade in English 5220.* Graded assignments will generally be returned within one to two weeks.

**Final paper/project** (8-10 pp. for undergraduate students; minimum 15 pp. for graduate students): Due at the end of the semester, this assignment is an opportunity for you to conduct an original analysis and to present the results in journal-article format. This 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.

For the final project, students interested in the scholarly pursuits of literature, linguistics, or both are encouraged to experiment with the new possibilities available to them via the interdisciplinarity of literary linguistics. Those who plan to (or already) teach at the secondary or post-secondary level are invited to think about ways our methods can apply to the teaching of language or literature. Creative writers are welcome to experiment with linguistic analysis of their own original texts, which may help them to see their work in new ways and generate new creative opportunities. You will have the opportunity to conduct original inquiries using literature, theoretical positioning, and methodologies of your own choosing but will be introduced to and have the opportunity to experiment with a number of approaches during the semester.

We will discuss this project in class as you generate ideas, analyze your selected text(s), and compose the final paper. Your paper should include a review of relevant scholarly literature, outline your research question(s) and rationale, provide appropriate theoretical grounding, overtly describe your research methods, present your data and results, and include analysis that makes and supports an original argument. I encourage you to discuss your project ideas with me early and often.

**Midterm 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 paper, and present your project to the class. See above description of course paper/project for preliminary specifications about what to include, although as we will discuss in class, this project and its goals are a little different from those of the final paper. Specific guidelines will be provided.

**Electronic journal:** All students will produce journal entries in response to readings and other assignments. I will provide assignment specifications, information about deadlines, and instructions for how to submit your work.

**Presentations** on researched and textual materials: Each student will present and lead class discussion. 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 an active, experiential course. Your presence, attentiveness, preparedness, and active contributions are of paramount importance both to the success of the course and to your individual success in it. You will need to complete all readings on time in order to be ready to contribute in class. Passive attendance, not doing the reading, failing to contribute to discussions or participate in activities, and/or any other kind of slacking will not be suffered gladly. Also, the whole class will work collaboratively from day one to determine the directions we will go in over the next 8 weeks. I hope everyone will want to be a part of that collaboration, but it is also a part of your course grade. (Please refer also to attendance policy on the next page.)

### Instructor Policies

**Attendance:** I think English 5220 is a fun and stimulating course, but your active contribution to this goal is a must. Readings, discussions, and activities complement each other. This means you need to be present and fully prepared every day to the extent that it is humanly possible. Because this is an abbreviated summer session and we will thus have to move relatively quickly, 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.*** 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 will be a substantial deduction to your course grade, up to and including the possibility of a course grade of E. It is of course 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 or at any other time. Unauthorized departure at the break will be recorded as an absence. Habitual lateness is also an attendance issue.

**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. Students who are not in class on time risk missing important course content. Also, when someone walks in late, it is distracting to other students and the instructor. The same goes for leaving early. Habitual lateness will result in a reduction of attendance and participation score and hence the course grade. If you are late, I recommend that you stay after class to make sure you have been marked present. Uncorrected lates count as absences.

**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 students will have to make a pretty strong case in order to be granted an extension.

**Classroom etiquette and controversial topics:** You are encouraged to read and think critically and of course are not required to agree with everything you read or everything that is said during discussions. Sometimes our conversations may get intense. We will occasionally discuss topics that are controversial and often highly charged. But I believe strongly in the educational value of addressing these topics and the intellectual growth that comes from engaging them and thinking critically about them. All thoughtful contributions are welcome in our class discussions and on our electronic journal; I simply ask that everyone be respectful to one another. The goal is for our classroom to be a safe place for you and your classmates to flex your intellectual muscles, where everyone feels comfortable generating, expressing, and challenging ideas. Your help in reaching this goal is essential.

**Student code of conduct:** Please familiarize yourself with and adhere to the WMU code of student conduct at <http://www.osc.wmich.edu/studentcode/conduct.html>. Students who unwilling or unable to abide by the code and respect the rights of everyone to a comfortable learning and teaching 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 prohibited because of their disruptive and impolite nature, and also because they keep students from fully participating. Active participation is part of your course grade, but 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.

**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.

**If you would like extra help with course material, you are always welcome in my office.** Please let me know if you 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 Monday 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:** As an advanced-level course, English 5220 includes a substantial workload, 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) seriously detrimental to your progress in the course.

### 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/studentcode/conduct.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 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.

**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 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.

**Students with disabilities** should contact Beth Denhartigh at 387-2116 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.

## Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

Links to readings marked 'online' are provided at <http://www.retroflexive.com/5220etexts>.

### Week 1

#### Monday, May 04: Introduction to course: Linguistic applications to literature

- Approaches to the study of literary linguistics.
- Linguistic terminology and areas of inquiry.

#### Wednesday, May 06: Dialect writing and American literature

For class, read:

1. Introduction and chapters 1-2 in *Dialect and Dichotomy*.
2. The following **online** texts by A.B. Longstreet:

- From *Georgia Scenes*: Preface, Publishers Note, and "The Horse Swap"
- From *Stories with a Moral*: "Darby the Politician"

Discussion topics:

- Literary dialect and features-level analysis.
- Dialect writing in English.
- Dialect humor in 19th-century America.

### Week 2

#### Monday, May 11: Literary dialect and African American English.

For class, read:

1. Lisa Green, "African American English."
2. Rosina Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English."
3. Chapters 3 and 6, *Dialect and Dichotomy*.
4. June Jordan, selected poems (online).
5. Mark Twain, "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It" (online).

Discussion topics:

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

#### Wednesday, May 13: The "plantation tradition" in American literature.

For class, read:

1. Thomas Nelson Page, "Marse Chan: A Tale of Old Virginia" (online).
2. Paul Laurence Dunbar, selected poems (online).
3. Joel Chandler Harris, from *Uncle Remus, His Songs and Sayings* (online).
4. Michele Birnbaum, "Dark Dialects."

Discussion topics:

- The literary contexts of the plantation tradition.
- Paul Laurence Dunbar: plantation tradition writer, or signifier?
- The plantation tradition and public discourse.

### Week 3

#### Monday, May 18: The complicated case of Charles W. Chesnutt.

For class, read:

1. Charles W. Chesnutt (online):
  - "Dave's Neckliss"
  - "Po' Sandy"
  - "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny"
2. Chapter 5 in *Dialect and Dichotomy*.

Discussion topics:

- Chesnutt and African American English.
- Chesnutt's literary career and linguistic documentation.

#### Wednesday, May 20: Discourse-level stylistics and literary language.

For class, read:

1. Roger Fowler, "Studying Literature as Language."
2. Margaret Freeman, "Cognitive Stylistics: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson."
3. Emily Dickinson, selected poems (online).
4. Peter Stockwell, "Cognitive Stylistics and the Theory of Metaphor."
5. Mary Louise Pratt, "Literature as Discourse: The Literary Speech Situation."

Discussion topics:

- Theoretical approaches to stylistics.
- Literature as 'natural' language?
- Cognitive stylistics.

### Week 4

#### Monday, May 25: Memorial Day observed. No class.

#### Wednesday, May 27: Literary dialect and the standardization of American English.

For class, read:

1. Stephen Crane, "Maggie, a Girl of the Streets" (online).
2. Momoka Nakamura, "Creating Indexicality."
3. Lisa Minnick, "Dialect literature and English in the USA: Standardization and National Linguistic Identity."

Discussion topics:

- Prestige, preference, and the construction of correctness.
- The rise of the urban 'other'.
- Literary dialect and standardization.

**Week 5:** Monday, June 01 is the last day to withdraw from course (not that you'd want to).

**Monday, June 01:** Work on collaborative projects.

**Wednesday, June 03:** Collaborative projects due with informal presentations.

**Week 6**

**Monday, June 08:** Pragmatics, speech act theory, and performativity.

For class, read:

1. J. L. Austin, from *How to Do Things with Words*.
2. Mary Louise Pratt, "Ideology and Speech Act Theory."
3. Allan Bell, "Back in Style: Reworking Audience Design."
4. Nikolas Coupland, "Language, Situation, and the Relational Self."
5. Howard Giles, "Couplandia and Beyond."

Discussion topics:

- Pragmatics and literary language.
- Speech act theory.
- Stylistic variation.

**Wednesday, June 10:** Pragmatics, speech act theory, and performativity.

For class, read:

1. Judith Butler, from *Gender Trouble*.
2. Lamont Antieau, "Lousy Conversations and All."
3. Fennell and Bennett, "Sociolinguistic Concepts and Literary Analysis."
4. Stephen Crane, "The Blue Hotel" (online).
5. One more literary reading; haven't decided what yet.

Discussion topics:

- Illocutionary force and linguistic performativity.
- Doing things with words.

**Week 7**

**Monday, June 15:** Gender, sexuality, and performativity.

For class, read:

1. Jennifer Coates, from *Men Talk*.
2. Scott Kiesling, "Playing the Straight Man."
3. Sally Johnson, "Theorizing Language and Masculinity."
4. Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, "The Most Important Event of My Life!"
5. Louie Crews, "Honey, Let's Talk about the Queens' English."
6. You pick the literature. Please get your suggestions in by May 27.

Discussion topics:

- Masculinity in the Old Southwest.
- Textual performance and performativity.

**Wednesday, June 17: Feminist stylistics.**

For class, read:

1. Sara Mills, "The Gendered Sentence."
2. Deirdre Burton, "Through Glass Darkly: Through Dark Glasses."
3. Ernest Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (online).
4. Gertrude Stein, selections (online).

Discussion topics:

- Feminist stylistics.
- Is literary language gendered?
- Language and gender within and beyond the text.

**Week 8**

**Monday, June 22:** Discuss progress and work on individual projects.

**Wednesday, June 24:** Last meeting! Papers due at class time with 5-minute presentations. Be prepared to discuss your research question, hypothesis, sources consulted and theoretical orientation, and central argument.