



English 522: Studies in American Literature
The Language of American Literature

Spring 2005, Section 10463: W 7:00-9:30 p.m. in 4021 Brown

Instructor: Dr. Lisa Minnick

Office: 718 Sprau

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Course Page: <http://www.retroflexive.com/522main>

Course description, purpose, and objectives: In English 522 this semester, 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 also creative writers are encouraged to experiment with the theories and methods of literary-linguistic analysis in relation to their own original texts.

Authors whose literary works we may consider include George Washington Cable, Charles W. Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, William Faulkner, Joel Chandler Harris, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Gertrude Stein, and Mark Twain. Most if not all of the texts we'll use are available online for no charge.

Texts: Minnick, *Dialect and Dichotomy*, Alabama, 2004; **online texts** and **electronic readings**.

Assignments and grading:

Grading criteria for all assignments: Please note that this is an advance undergraduate/graduate course and thus **not** an introductory course in 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 **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 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	40%
Collaborative project	20%	Collaborative project	20%
Collaborative presentation	10%	Presentation	15%
Electronic journal	20%	Electronic journal	10%
Attendance and participation	20%	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 text-analysis study and to present the results in journal-article format, as appropriate at the advanced-undergraduate and graduate levels. We will discuss this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, analyze your selected text(s), and write up the results.

Collaborative project: This is a collaborative project 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, and write up the results in a short paper.

Presentations: For graduate students, this will be an individual presentation and/or discussion leadership on researched and textual materials. For undergraduates, this will be an opportunity to present 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: I think that English 522 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 fully prepared and present 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 grading criteria, missing more than a single class meeting may be detrimental to your grade.

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 assignment specifications, information about deadlines, and instructions for how to submit your work.

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 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

See our class updates page at <http://www.retroflexive.com/522updates> for news, schedule changes, and announcements. These things happen.

Links to all online readings will be provided on the updates page.

Week 1: Introduction to course: Linguistic applications to literature

Jan 05

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

Week 2: Dialect literature in American English

Jan 12

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
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:

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

Week 3: Discourse- and pragmatic-level analysis

Jan 19

For class, read:

1. Chapters 2 and 3 in *Dialect and Dichotomy*
2. Lamont Antieau, "Lousy Conversations and All," *Southern Journal of Linguistics* (library's electronic 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 web site

Discussion topics:

- Discourse and pragmatic analysis.
- Methodologies and theoretical approaches.
- Begin work on collaborative projects (due Wednesday, February 16 at class time).

Week 4: Language in the African American community

Jan 26

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

1. Lisa Green, "African American English" (electronic reserve)
2. Rosina Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English" (electronic 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

Feb 02

For class, read:

1. Michele Birnbaum, "Dark Dialects" (electronic reserve)
2. Lee Pederson, "Language in the Uncle Remus Tales" (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
- IV. How Mr. Rabbit was too sharp for Mr. Fox
- V. "The Story of the Deluge, and how it came about

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

Feb 09

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

Feb 16

- Informal presentations of collaborative projects.

Week 8: Stylistics and literary language

Feb 23

For class, read:

1. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement," (electronic reserve)
2. Roger Fowler, "Studying Literature as Language" (electronic reserve)
3. Helmut Esau, Norma Bagnall, and Cheryl Ware, "Faulkner, Literary Criticism, and Linguistics" (electronic reserve)
4. excerpt from Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1937), online—will be linked from updates page
5. Chapter 6 of *Dialect and Dichotomy*

Discussion topics:

- Theoretical approaches to stylistics.
- Literary dialect and social status.
- Language as characterization.

Week 9: Mar 02 Spring Break! No class.

Week 10: What literature can reveal about language; last date to withdraw from classes: Mon., March 07

Mar 09

For class, read:

1. Michael Ellis, "Literary Dialect as Linguistic Evidence" (JSTOR)
2. William Evans, "French-English Literary Dialect in *The Grandissimes*" (JSTOR)
3. George Washington Cable, excerpt from *The Grandissimes* (1880), online at Documenting the American South
4. Katherine Wyly Mille, "Ambrose Gonzales's Gullah: What It May Say about Variation" (electronic reserve)

Discussion topics:

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

Week 11: More on what literature can reveal about language

Mar 16

For class, read:

1. Cynthia Bernstein, from *The Text and Beyond*,(electronic reserve)
2. B. A. Fennell, "Literary Data and Linguistic Analysis: The Example of Modern German Immigrant Worker Literature" (electronic reserve)
3. Mark Twain, excerpt from *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) (UVA Electronic Text Archive–specifics TBA)
4. Chapter 4 of *Dialect and Dichotomy*

Discussion topics:

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

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

Mar 23

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

Week 13: Feminist stylistics

Mar 30

For class, read:

1. Sara Mills, "The Gendered Sentence" (electronic reserve)
2. Deirdre Burton, "Through Glass Darkly: Through Dark Glasses" (electronic reserve)
3. Ernest Hemingway, excerpt from fiction (specifics TBA)
4. Gertrude Stein, excerpt from fiction and/or poetry (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 Electronic Text Archive)

Discussion topics:

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

Week 14: Open week – we'll read texts suggested by students, catch up on any topics for which we need more time, talk about project papers, or anything else that comes up

Apr 06

Week 15: Last meeting! Papers due at class time; finish discussions of readings; final thoughts

April 13