

University of Southern California

Department of Linguistics

Course number: Ling 115g
Title: Language, Society and Culture
Units: 4
Classroom: SGM 601
Semester: Spring 2018
Lectures: Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:00 – 3:20 p.m.
Discussion sections: Mondays at 9 or 10 a.m., GFS 108
Professor: Sandra Ferrari Disner
Office: GFS 301d
Office hours: TBA
Email: sdisner@usc.edu
Teaching Assistants: Yifan Yang

Course description:

This course will introduce you to the study of language as a cultural and social phenomenon. We will examine the various ways that language, society, and culture interact with, and influence, each other. We will consider why people speak in different ways, and how the language we make use of has important consequences for the projection of identity and self-image in society. It is our hope that, at the very least, you will develop a greater appreciation of the worldwide importance of language, and of your own innate and acquired language skills. Specific topics covered in this course, in order of presentation after the introduction, are:

- Brief history of the English language
- Language, dialects, and varieties
- Diglossia, code-switching, and code-mixing
- Language maintenance and shift
- National languages and language planning
- English as a global language
- Pidgins and creoles
- Language(s) in the USA and California
- The Ebonics debate: African American Vernacular English and language in education
- Accents and dialects of English
- Bilingualism
- Language and gender

Course Reading:

A. Most of the readings for this course are contained in the *Ling 115 Course Reader*, which will soon be available from the USC Bookstore. Until such time as this volume appears on the shelves (and also when additional readings may be assigned), the required articles will be posted in the 'Content' section of Blackboard.

B. A set of *Ling 115 Lecture Notes* will also be available from the USC Bookstore shortly. (Until such time, lecture notes will be posted on Blackboard.)

C. Further readings will be posted as .pdf files on Blackboard, and identified accordingly as required or optional readings.

Course Requirements:

In addition to the readings, the requirements for this course include:

- 2 midterm exams (*each* 22% of the final grade)
- 3 Assignments:
 - Brief essay on “The way a person speaks...” (1%)
 - Language planning assignment (10%)
 - Dialect survey (10%)
- Commentary on three films (*each* 2%)
- Final exam (22%)
- Unscheduled, in-class pop quizzes – see below (7%)

Late Submission and Make-up Work:

For the midterm exams (not the final, which obeys strict University rules), if a *documented* emergency occurs, a student will be allowed to make up the exam within five days. This will only be permitted once per semester, per student. Undocumented emergencies will not be granted such consideration.

All assignments are expected to be submitted on time. A deduction of 10% *per day* will be applied automatically to any assignments submitted late, including film commentaries; here ‘late’ is defined as ‘submitted *after the end of the lecture* on the due date’. Assignments submitted during or after the following class session will no longer be accepted at all.

Seven percent of the final grade will reflect your score on the pop quizzes given in class. There will be more than seven quizzes given (at 1% for each passed quiz) but their total contribution will not exceed 7%. (So you are allowed to miss a few; do not stress out about this.) Pop quizzes are ‘open book’; your computer may be used to review your notes, but not to search for answers online. Pop quizzes must be taken in class and submitted at the end of class; late submissions will not be accepted. Regular attendance will, of course, improve your chances of receiving full credit for these quizzes.

It is not possible to offer extra credit opportunities for this course. Please do not expect, or even ask for, extra credit assignments.

Academic integrity:

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. Students are expected to uphold the USC Student Conduct Code (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>). Violations of the code, including plagiarism, harm every student in the class and carry strict sanctions. (See <https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/academic-integrity/>). Any student

who is found cheating on an exam or homework, or who facilitates cheating by another student, will receive no credit for that work, and the matter may be reported to SJACS.

Students with disabilities:

Students needing special accommodations (e.g., longer exam time) due to a physical or learning disability should contact the instructor as early in the semester as possible, and should also contact Disability Services and Programs (DSP) to obtain a letter of verification for approved accommodations. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776 or visit <https://dsp.usc.edu/students/>

Course Schedule:

January 8: Introduction. History of English.

January 10 (assignment): Brief (1-2 pp.) essay on “What can we tell about a person by the way s/he speaks?” Due in class on January 17.

January 10 and 17: History of English (continued). Languages, Dialects, and Varieties.

January 22 and 24: Diglossia, Code-switching, and Code-mixing

January 29 and 31: Language Maintenance, Shift and Loss

February 5: Film: “The Linguists”. Commentary on film due on February 14.

February 7: [First midterm exam](#)

February 12 and 14: National Languages and Language Planning

February 14 (assignment): Language planning assignment, due February 28.

February 21 and 26: English as a Global Language

Excerpt from film “Many Tongues Called English” (No commentary required)

February 28: The sound patterns of Global English.

February 28: [Language planning assignment due]

March 5 and 7: Pidgins and Creoles: The development of new languages in contact situations.

March 19: Language(s) in the USA and California

March 21: Film: “American Tongues”. Commentary on the film due on April 2.

March 26: [Second midterm exam](#) On second set of lectures only.

March 28: African American Vernacular English I: Creole origins

April 2: African American Vernacular English II: Language in education

April 4 and 9: Accents of American English

April 9 (assignment): Regional accent survey, due in class on April 23.

April 11 and 16: Bilingualism: Social, cognitive, and educational issues relating to the acquisition of two or more languages. Guest lecturer on April 16: Eleonora Rossi
Excerpt from film “Speaking in Tongues” (No commentary required)

April 18: Film: “War of the Sexes: Language” Commentary on the film due on April 25.

April 23: Language and Gender

April 23: [Regional accent survey due]

April 25: Language and Gender (continued). Concluding remarks.

May 7, at 2 pm in classroom: [Final exam](#), on third set of lectures only (i.e., not cumulative!)