

University of Southern California

Department of Linguistics

Course number: Ling 115g
Title: Language and Society
Units: 4
Classroom: WPH B27
Semester: Spring 2020
Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:20 p.m.
Discussion sections: Fridays, 9 and 10 a.m.
Instructor: Prof. Sandra Ferrari Disner
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Teaching Assistants: Madhumanti Datta (madhumad@usc.edu), Silvia Kim (silbiaki@usc.edu)

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 include:

- Brief history of the English language
- Language, dialects, and other varieties
- Diglossia and code-switching
- Language maintenance and shift
- National languages and language planning
- English as a global language
- Pidgins and creoles
- Language(s) in the USA
- Language in education
- Accents and dialects of English
- Language and gender
- Bilingualism
- Language variation and change

Course Readings:

➤ The textbook for this course is *Language and Society*, (2019) [L&S] written by Professor Andrew Simpson, Chair of USC's Linguistics Department. Copies are available in the USC Bookstore, and also through the USC Libraries' e-book collection (**EBSCOhost**).

➤ Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard, and identified as required or optional readings, accordingly.

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%)

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 one or more; 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. The TAs will be monitoring screen use. 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.

The numeric value of one pop quiz (1% of the course grade) will be added to the column of those who participate in a brief (approx. 15 minutes) perceptual test on the sounds of English vowels. The deadline for this extra-credit project is January 30. See your TA for details.

It is not possible to receive any other extra credit opportunities for this course. Please do not expect, or ask for, extra credit assignments beyond this one.

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 subsequent class session will not be accepted at all.

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/>). You should be apprised that the

instructor, a forensic linguist, is experienced in detecting such violations. 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 have to 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 Disability Services and Programs (DSP) as soon as possible to obtain a letter of verification for approved accommodations, and should also contact the instructor in this regard. To contact DSP, call (213) 740-0776 or visit <https://dsp.usc.edu/students/>

Course Schedule:

The chapters are listed here in their entirety. However, any portions that are *not* required reading will be noted in the Announcements section of Blackboard.

January 14 & 16 -- Introduction. The history of English. [Lecture notes posted on Blackboard]

January 14 (assignment) -- Write a brief (1-2 pp.) essay on "What can we tell about a person by the way s/he speaks?" Due in class on January 21.

January 21 & 23 -- History of English (continued). *L&S* chapter 1: Languages & Dialects

January 28 & 30 -- *L&S* chapter 4: Diglossia and Code-Switching

February 4 & 6 -- *L&S* chapter 3: Language Maintenance, Shift, and Loss

February 11 -- Film: "The Linguists". Commentary on the film due on February 25.

February 13 -- [First midterm exam](#)

February 18 and 20 -- *L&S* chapter 2: Languages with Special Roles

February 18 (assignment) -- Language planning assignment, due March 5.

February 25 and 27 -- *L&S* chapter 6: The Globalization of English

Excerpts from video "The Story of English" [No film commentary required]

March 3 and 5 -- *L&S* chapter 5: Pidgins and Creoles. The development of new languages in contact situations.

March 5 [Language planning assignment due]

March 10, 12, and 24 -- *L&S* chapter 7: Language(s) in the U.S.

Also "Language Policy in the United States", Tiersma 2010 [posted on Blackboard] and excerpts from the film "Speaking in Tongues" [No film commentary required]

March 26 -- [Second midterm exam](#), on second set of lectures only.

March 31 -- Film: "American Tongues". Commentary on the film due on April 9.

April 2 & 7 -- Accents of American English [Lecture notes to be posted on Blackboard]

April 2 (assignment) -- Regional accent survey, due in class on April 23

April 9 & 14 -- *L&S* chapter 10: Language and Gender

April 16 -- Film: "War of the Sexes: Language". Commentary on the film due on April 28

April 21 -- *L&S* chapter 8: Bilingualism. Social, cognitive, and educational issues relating to the acquisition of two or more languages.

April 23 -- Bilingualism, continued. Guest lecturer: Prof. Judith Kroll

April 23 [Regional accent survey due]

April 28 -- *L&S* chapter 11: Language Variation and Change (pp. 406-416 only).

The insights of William Labov.

April 30 -- Application of Labov's research to forensic linguistics. Concluding remarks.

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