



English 4720: Language Variation in American English
Fall 2010, MW 10:00-11:50 a.m. in 3045 Brown

Instructor: Dr. Lisa Minnick <lisa.minnick@wmich.edu>
Office hours: Tuesdays 3-5 p.m. and by appointment in 923 Sprau

Teaching Assistant: Ms. Aanee Ruple <aaneekai@gmail.com>
T.A. Office Hours: MW 12– 1:30 p.m. in 4028 Brown

Course Page: <http://www.retroflexive.com/4720main>

From the catalog: English 4720 is study of regional and social varieties of American English from sociolinguistic perspectives, focusing on the forces that influence different types of language variation. Examines issues of linguistic bias and offers a multi-cultural perspective on the role of language in daily life.

Course description, purpose, and objectives: In this course, we will discuss the theories and practices of language variation research, particularly as applied to American English. In doing so, we will consider approaches to the study of language variation, with attention to key figures, studies, and methodologies. We will discuss the functions and effects of dialectal variation, and how factors such as geography, ethnicity, gender, social status, and other extralinguistic variables interact with language and contribute to variation. We will also explore how popular perceptions and attitudes contribute to the differential valuation of American English varieties and the effects of these valuations. Students will learn key competencies associated with linguistic research and apply them to original linguistic research projects.

Students who complete the course successfully will acquire the following :

- language description skills, including phonetic transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet.
- working knowledge of terminology used in the discipline of linguistics.
- understanding of the external (social) factors that affect language variation.
- understanding of the internal (linguistic) mechanisms of variation.
- awareness of language attitudes, how they are constructed, and how they function.

Texts: •Finegan and Rickford, *Language in the U.S.A.* (Cambridge, 2004).
 •\$10 fee card (available at campus bookstore in the Bernhard Center).

Assignments and values:

Final exam	20%
Collaborative project	20%
Midterm exam	15%
Working-group activities	15%
Quizzes	15%
Homework	10%
Attendance and participation	05%

In order to participate in online discussions and complete electronic assignments, all students will need to join our class Facebook group: English 4720, Fall 2010.

Exams: The midterm and final exams will include phonetic transcriptions, articulatory descriptions, identifications and terminology, and questions covering lecture, discussion, and readings.

Working-group activities: Each student will be part of a working group for class activities and the collaborative project. Working-group activities are experiential activities for applying the theories and methods you're learning in class.

Collaborative project: For the final working-group activity, students will design and conduct an original language-variation study centered on gathering and analyzing linguistic data. Each group will present its results in a 6-8 page research paper, in journal-article format. We will discuss and work on this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, consult scholarly literature, carry out your research, and analyze your results. This project is an opportunity for you to apply the material you learn in class in a hands-on, experiential way.

Homework assignments engage the skills and knowledge you will need for the course, as well as make it possible to explore topics beyond our classroom readings and discussions and to collaborate and exchange ideas in creative ways.

Quizzes: In this course, you will learn the International Phonetic Alphabet and other linguistic description skills and terms. Quizzes are opportunities to apply this knowledge as part of your preparation for the advanced instruction in English linguistics that occurs in ENGL 4720.

Course Policies

Attendance and participation: I think Language Variation in American English is fun and interesting, but it is also demanding, requiring a solid set of skills and base of knowledge that you will have to master early on, so active participation is a must. This means you need to be present every day to the extent that it is humanly possible. Readings, discussions, and activities complement each other, so you'll need to be in class in order to participate in all components of the course. If you must miss class, my policy is to permit three "free" absences. By "free," I mean no questions asked and also that I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. I also mean that's all you get. Exceptions can only be made in cases of serious illness (such as those requiring hospitalization) and other documentable emergencies. If you miss additional class meetings, there may be a substantial deduction in your course grade. Five or more absences may result in a course grade of E. It is each student's responsibility to stay on top of all course material and assignments and get the notes from a classmate following an absence. Missed classes cannot be made up in office hours or at any other time. Leaving at the break counts as an absence. Try extra hard not to miss working-group activity days.

Arriving late to class and leaving early should be kept to a minimum. If you're late, you risk missing important course content which may be over by the time you get there, and late arrivals can be distracting to other students and the instructor. The same goes for leaving early. If you are late, please stay after class to make sure you have been marked present. Habitual lateness will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation score and hence your course grade.

Late work is generally frowned upon in college and elsewhere, and this class is no exception. Arrangements must 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.

Makeups: Quizzes and in-class assignments and activities cannot be made up if missed because of lateness or absence. Makeups on major assignments, such as exams or project deadlines, 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 or makeup exam.

Classroom etiquette: You are encouraged to read and think critically and of course not required to agree with everything you read or hear 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 the WMU Student Code at http://osc.wmich.edu/docs/WMU_studentcode.pdf. Students who do not 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 because they impede full participation. Active participation is part of your grade; plus, nothing interesting will happen for you in class without your input. You have to make it happen.

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. *We will use voice recording equipment in our work for English 4720, but **surreptitious recording (i.e. recording any individual without his or her knowledge) is unethical and therefore not allowed, either in our linguistic research or in any other form or context.***

Learning the discipline of linguistics is a cumulative process. Gaps in your knowledge early on can cause problems later. Let me know as soon as you can if you feel like you're getting behind. My job is to help you learn this stuff, so by all means take advantage of this resource by coming to office hours, talking with me after class or during the break, or making an appointment to meet with Aanee or me.

Grading criteria for all assignments:

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	= 2.0 points
DC	= 1.5 points
D	= 1.0 point
E	= 0.5 points for work that does not meet minimum standards; 0 for work not turned in.

University Policies

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 WMU's general policy to permit students to fulfill obligations set aside by their faith. 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. I ask to be informed early in the semester if you must miss class for religious reasons.

Students with disabilities should contact Ms. Beth Denhartigh at 387-2116 or beth.denhartigh@wmich.edu so that any physical, learning, vision, hearing, or other disability can be documented and accommodations arranged. Please note that a determination must be made by Ms. Denhartigh's office before accommodations can be made.

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. **All students are required to read and comply fully with the policies and definitions outlined in the Western Michigan University statement on academic integrity, which can be accessed online at <http://osc.wmich.edu/academichonesty/definitionsofviolations.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 complicity or 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.

Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

I reserve the right to make minor adjustments or massive changes to this syllabus as a result of interference from reality and will keep students fully informed of any such changes. These things happen. Please check our Facebook group page or our class updates page, available at <http://www.retroflexive.com/4720updates>, regularly for news, schedule changes, and announcements.

Lectures and discussions will not be recapitulations of readings; rather, lectures and readings complement each other. Therefore, you will be expected to **come to class each day having completed the assigned readings** so that you can participate fully and get the most from your experience in the course.

Week 1: Introduction to course; what is language variation?

Sept 08

Wednesday, Sept 08

- Introduction to course.
- What is language variation?
- Approaches to the study of language variation.
- Course goals and objectives.

Week 2: Introduction to the discipline of linguistics and the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Sept 13-15

Monday, Sept 13: Come to class having read Foreword to *Language in the USA*.

- What every 4720 student needs to know about linguistics.
- Terminology: the language of linguistics.
- Linguistic features and independent variables.

Wednesday, Sept 15: Come to class having read Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English."

- Places and manners of articulation.
- The International Phonetic Alphabet.

Week 3: What is American English? History and diversity of the English language in the United States.

Sept 20-22

Monday, Sept 20: Homework 1 due. Continue to work through Algeo and Pyles.

- Fun with IPA: Learning phonetic transcription.
- Understanding articulatory descriptions.
- **Begin working-group activity 1: Your linguistic profile (due Wednesday, Sept 29).**

Wednesday, Sept 22: Quiz 1. Also, come to class having read *USA* Ch. 1, "American English: Its Origins and History."

- The history and diversity of American English.
- Continue work on IPA and articulatory phonetics.

Week 4: Regional variation and the Northern Cities Shift.

Sept 27-29

Monday, Sept 27: Homework 2 due. Also, come to class having read *USA* Ch. 3: "Regional Dialects" and online readings on the Northern Cities Shift, linked at <http://www.retroflexive.com/4720updates>.

- Language variation and dialect geography.
- Language variation and change in action: the Northern Cities Shift.

Wednesday, Sept 29: Working-group activity 1 (linguistic profile) due. Also, continue to work through online readings on the Northern Cities Shift, linked at 4720updates.

- The Northern Cities Shift.
- **Begin working-group activity 2: The Northern Cities Shift** (time permitting).

Week 5: Working-group activity 2: The Northern Cities Shift.

Oct 04-06

Monday, Oct 04: Working-group activity 2: Eliciting, documenting, and analyzing the NCS.

Wednesday, Oct 06: Working-group activity 2 (complete): Field reports due at end of period.

Week 6: Social variation, language attitudes, and perceptual dialectology.

Oct 11-13

Monday, Oct 11: *USA* Ch. 4: "Social Varieties of American English."

- Social and ethnic variation.
- Independent variables and how they interact with language.

Wednesday, Oct 13: Quiz 2. Also, come to class having read *USA* Ch. 26: "Language Attitudes to Speech."

- Perceptual dialectology and language attitudes.
- **Collaborative projects assigned (due Wednesday, December 08).**

Week 7: Language variation in the African American community.

Oct 18-20

Monday, October 18: Homework 3 due. Also, read *USA* Ch. 5: "African American English."

- African American English: features and history.
- The linguistic and cultural significance of AAE.

Wednesday, October 20: Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English," and *USA* Ch. 16: "Ebonics and Its Controversy."

- Language attitudes and AAE.
- The Ann Arbor case and the Oakland Resolution.
- Bridge readers and other experimental methods.

Week 8: Language variation in the African American community (continued). Midterm exam.

Oct 25-27

Monday, Oct 25: Complete discussion of AAE. Review for midterm exam.

Wednesday, Oct 27: Midterm exam.

Week 9: Stylistic variation.

Nov 01-03

Monday, Nov 01: Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

- Intraspeaker variation.
- Stylistic variation in theory and practice.

Wednesday, Nov 03: Continue to work through Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style."

- Style shifting and linguistic repertoire.
- Measuring stylistic variation.

Week 10: Language, gender, and sexuality.

Nov 08-10

Monday, Nov 08, is the last day to withdraw from the course (not that you'd want to).

Monday, Nov 08: Quiz 3 and *USA* Ch. 22: "Language, Gender, and Sexuality" and Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity."

- "Women's language"? Some traditional views.
- Language and gender and gendered language.

Wednesday, Nov 10: Kiesling, "Dude," and Levon, "Hearing 'Gay': Prosody, Interpretation, and the Affective Judgments of Men's Speech."

- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.
- Is there "gay language"?

Week 11: Protocols for empirical research; developing your research question.

Nov 15-17

Monday, Nov 15: Homework 4 due. Also, read handout on ethical research protocols.

- Ethical research protocols and informed consent.
- Research questions, hypotheses, and methodologies: starting a linguistic field project.
- **Working-group activity 3 (begin): Developing and articulating your research question.**

Wednesday, Nov 17: Working-group activity 3 (complete): Developing and articulating your research question. Proposals due at end of class period.

Week 12: Continue work on collaborative projects.

Nov 22-24

Monday, Nov 22: Quiz 4. Also, work on collaborative projects.

- Ways to get answers to your research question and support your hypothesis.
- Developing data collection instruments and analysis methods.
- Principles of experimental design and participant selection.
- Gathering and analyzing data.

Wednesday, Nov 24: No class. Release time to work on projects.

Week 13: Work on collaborative projects.

Nov 29-Dec 01

Monday, Nov 29: Work on collaborative projects.

Wednesday, Dec 01: Work on collaborative projects.

Week 14: Present and discuss collaborative projects.

Dec 06-08

Monday, Dec 06: Begin project presentations.

Wednesday, Dec 08: Complete presentations; review for exam. **Collaborative projects due.**

Week 15: Final exam Wednesday, December 15, 8-10 a.m.