



**English 5970: Studies in English
Politics and the English Language**

Spring 2008, Tuesdays 4:00-6:20 p.m. in 1345 Schneider

Instructor: Dr. Lisa Minnick

Office: 923 Sprau

Office hours: Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 12 noon and by appointment

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Course Page: <http://www.retroflexive.com/5970main>

Course description, purpose, and objectives: Taking its name from George Orwell's 1946 essay of the same title, *Politics and the English Language* focuses on linguistic authority and social organization. Beginning with a historical approach, we will cover language in politics and the politics of language, from policy issues such as 'English-only' and 'official language' legislation to linguistic prescriptivism and ideas about standardness. We will also analyze language attitudes and the ways that language can be implicated in ideologies about race, class, gender, and sexuality. And since it's an election year, we will take a look at the ways that language is deployed on behalf of candidates for overtly political aims.

Texts:

- James Milroy and Lesley Milroy, *Authority in Language*, 3rd edition (Routledge, 1999)
- Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent* (Routledge, 1997)
- Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, *Language and Sexuality* (Cambridge, 2003)
- Course pack, available at the campus bookstore.

Grading criteria for all assignments: Please note that this is an advanced undergraduate/graduate course and not a course in how to do 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 for excellent, top-quality 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.

Assignments:

Course project/paper	30%
Electronic journal	20%
Collaborative project	20%
Presentation	15%
Attendance and participation	15%

Course paper/project (8-10 pp. for undergraduate students; 12-15 pp. for graduate students): This assignment is an opportunity for you to conduct your own original study of any area related to our course topics and to present the results in journal-article format, as appropriate at the advanced-undergraduate and graduate levels. The 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. You will need to research, develop, draft, revise, and edit conscientiously over the assignment period in order to complete this assignment satisfactorily. We will discuss this project in class as you select your topic and generate ideas, and I encourage you to meet with me to discuss your project and drafts of your paper.

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. I will provide you with assignment specifications, information about deadlines, and instructions for how to submit your work.

Collaborative project: The goal of the collaborative project is to follow up on course topics of particular interest to your group and pursue that interest beyond regular coursework. Students will work together in small groups in and outside of class to generate ideas, do research, prepare a class presentation and paper.

Presentation on researched and textual materials: This is an opportunity for each student to 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 5970 is designed to be an active, experiential course for students. Your presence, attentiveness, preparedness, and active contributions are of paramount importance both to the success of the course and to your individual success. You'll need to complete all readings and other assignments on time in order to be ready to contribute in class. Passive learning, not doing the reading, persistent failure to contribute to discussions, not participating in activities, and/or any other kind of slacking will not be suffered gladly and will affect participation score, which along with attendance counts for 15% of course grade. (Please refer to attendance policy below.)

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. 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.

Instructor Policies

Attendance: English 5970 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 present and fully prepared 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 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 may be a substantial deduction to your course grade, up to and including the possibility of a course grade of E. It is 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. Leaving at the break will be recorded as an absence. Habitual lateness will also affect your attendance record.

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. When someone walks in late, it is distracting to other students and the instructor. The same goes for leaving early. It is the responsibility of all students to stay on top of what goes on in class whether present or not. Habitual lateness will result in a reduction of attendance and participation score and hence the course grade. Leaving at the break will also be recorded as an absence. 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: You are encouraged to read and think critically and thus you are not required to agree with everything you read or everything that is said during discussions 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 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 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 also because they keep you from fully participating. Your 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.

Instructor Policies, continued

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.

Electronic copies of assignments will not be accepted in lieu of hard copies. Plan ahead to make sure your printing needs can be met in time for due dates.

Graded assignments, papers, and exams will generally be returned within one to two weeks.

If you would like extra help with course material, you are always welcome in my office. Stop by during office hours or let me know you if 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 a few days 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, the English 5970 workload is substantial, 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) detrimental to your progress in the course.

Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

See our class updates page at <http://www.retroflexive.com/5970updates> for news, schedule changes, and announcements. These things happen.

Week 1: Introduction to course.

Jan 08

Discussion topics:

- Introduction to course and requirements.
- What this course is and what it is not.
- Some thoughts about the ways language functions in a political culture.

Week 2: Language and politics and the politics of language.

Jan 15

For class, read:

1. Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (in coursepack, hereafter 'CP').
2. Fairclough, "'Political Correctness': The Politics of Language and Culture" (CP).
3. Bourdieu, "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges (CP).
4. Lippi-Green, Introduction and chapter 1, "The Linguistic Facts of Life" (pp. 3-41).

Discussion topics:

- Crash course in linguistics as an area of inquiry.
- Linguistic applications to social and cultural analysis.
- Politics and language.

Week 3: Standardness and language authority.

Jan 22

For class, read:

1. Milroy and Milroy, preface and chapters 1-4 (pp. vii-76), *Authority in Language*.
2. Locate and read at least one of the references cited in Milroy and Milroy.

Discussion topics:

- Standardization, prescription, and language attitudes.
- Language authority and enforcement.

Week 4: The politics of prescription.

Jan 29

For class, read:

1. Baugh and Cable, "The Appeal to Authority" (CP).
2. Swift, "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue" (CP).
3. Johnson, preface to *A Dictionary of the English Language* (CP).
4. Bodine, "Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar" (CP).

Discussion topics:

- Prescriptivism past and present.
- The ownership of language.

Week 5: The establishment of American English.

Feb 05

For class, read:

1. Simpson, "Founding Fathers and the Legacies of Language" (CP).
2. Webster, from *Dissertations on the English Language* (CP).
3. Franklin, letter to Noah Webster (CP).

Discussion topics:

- An American language?
- New World prescriptivism.
- Language and democracy.

Week 6: Politics and American English.

Feb 12

For class, read:

1. Mencken, from *The American Language* (CP).
2. Lippi-Green, chapter 2, "The Myth of Non-Accent."
3. Lippi-Green, chapter 3, "The Standard Language Myth."
4. Lippi-Green, chapter 4, "Language Ideology and the Language Subordination Model."

Discussion topics:

- Variation in American English.
- The value differential.

Week 7: American English, region, and race.

Feb 19

For class, read:

1. Lippi-Green, chapter 9, "The Real Trouble with Black English."
2. Lippi-Green, chapter 10, "Hillbillies, Rednecks, and Southern Belles."
3. Lippi-Green, chapter 11, "The Stranger within the Gates."

Discussion topics:

- Who owns American English?
- Language and immigration.

Week 8: Midterm collaborative project presentations.

Feb 26

Presentations of midterm collaborative projects, as scheduled.

Week 9: Spring break! No class.

Mar 04

Don't worry; there's plenty to read over the break!

Week 10: Language policy, language planning, and the official language of the United States.

Mar 11

For class, read:

1. Daoust, "Language Planning and Language Reform" (CP).
2. Wiley, "Language Planning, Language Policy, and the English-Only Movement" (CP).
3. U.S. English position papers (online: linked to 5970updates page).
4. Dennis Baron, Language Log (CP).
5. News articles (online: linked to updates page).

Discussion topics:

- How language policy happens.
- The official language of the United States.
- The English-only movement.
- Institutionalizing English.

Monday, March 17: Last day to withdraw from course (not that you'd want to).

Week 11: Media and language policy.

Mar 18

For class, read:

1. Lippi-Green, chapter 5, "Teaching Children How to Discriminate."
2. Lippi-Green, chapter 7, "The Information Industry."
3. James, "BBC Broadcast English" (CP).
4. Bender, from the *NBC Handbook of Pronunciation* (CP).

Discussion topics:

- The media as language academy.
- Language variation as social signifier.

Week 12: Language, gender, and sexuality

Mar 25

For class, read:

1. Cameron, "Gender and Language Ideologies" (CP).
2. Mills, "Class, Gender, and Politeness" (CP).
3. Mendoza-Denton, "Pregnant Pauses: Silence and Authority in the Hill-Clarence Thomas Hearings" (CP).
4. Ehrlich, "Coercing Gender: Language in Sexual Assault Adjudication Processes" (CP).

Discussion topics:

- The politics of language and gender.
- Politeness as linguistic and political issues.
- Gender and public discourse.

Week 13: Language, gender, and sexuality

April 01

For class, read:

Cameron and Kulick, preface and chapters 1-3 (to page 73).

Discussion topics:

- Sex, gender, and sexuality.
- The language(s) of sexuality.
- Using language to perform gender and sexuality.

Week 14: Language, gender, and sexuality

April 08

For class, read Cameron and Kulick, chapters 4-6.

Discussion topics:

- Is there gay and lesbian language?
- Language and desire.
- The future of language and sexuality theory.

Week 15: Last meeting! Language of the presidential campaign; the role of media in the campaign.

April 15

For class:

1. Choose one of the presidential candidates and find coverage of a specific news event about him or her, from three different newspapers. Ideally, select these articles from ideologically diverse news sources. Be ready to discuss similarities or differences in the coverage.
2. Post YouTube links to two campaign ads on NiceNet. Be ready to talk about why you think they are particularly interesting, in light of our course content over the last 15 weeks.

Term papers due Friday, April 18, by 5 p.m. *Hard copies only* will be accepted.