



Empress Theodora (6th cen.)

## English 5970: Language, Gender, and Culture

Spring 2009, Tuesdays 4:00-6:20 p.m. in 3048 Brown

**Instructor:** Dr. Lisa Minnick

**Office:** 923 Sprau

**Office hours:** Wednesdays 2-4 p.m. and by appointment

**Email:** [lisa.minnick@wmich.edu](mailto:lisa.minnick@wmich.edu) (preferred mode of contact)

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

**Course description, purpose, and objectives:** From questions about whether language can be sexist to inquiries into whether women and men speak differently, the study of language and gender explores internal (linguistic) and external (social) structures and the ways that these structures interact. The result of these interactions is our language, a wildly complex human tool constructed as much by our most deeply held cultural beliefs and attitudes as to meet our communicative needs.

In this course, we will consider the history of language and gender as an area of inquiry and analyze its theoretical and methodological developments from early research to the present. We will also consider the influences of culture, power, and ideology on language and on the complex ways speakers learn to select from the linguistic options available to them. Additionally, control of and authority over language and its public and private uses will be explored, along with the tradition of linguistic rebellion in response to prevailing attitudes about gender, sexuality, culture, and language.

Students will read intensively and voluminously and write frequently. Preparation for and participation in class discussion are essential and non-negotiable. In addition to gaining an understanding of theories and practices of research into language and gender, students will also acquire enhanced knowledge of linguistic terms, concepts, and history. No background in linguistics is required but curiosity about it or interest in it is a must.

### Texts:

- Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (Cambridge, 2003)
- Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, *Language and Sexuality Reader* (Routledge, 2006)
- Jennifer Coates, *Language and Gender Reader* (Blackwell, 1998)

### Assignments:

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

**Final 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.

**Midterm 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, reach consensus, do research, and prepare a class presentation and paper.

**Presentation on researched and textual materials:** Each student will 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 attendance, 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 your course grade. (Please refer to attendance policy below.)

**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 <b>excellent, top-quality work.</b>
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.

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

### Course 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 or at any other time. 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. 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 and controversial topics:** You are encouraged to read and think critically and of course 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. Sometimes our conversations may get intense. We are dealing with topics that are controversial and often highly charged. But I believe strongly in the educational value of addressing these topics and the intellectual growth that comes from engaging them and thinking critically about them. All thoughtful contributions are welcome in class discussions and on the electronic journal; I ask only that everyone be respectful to each other. The goal is for our classroom to be a safe place for you and your classmates 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 prohibited 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.

**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.

**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) seriously detrimental to your progress in the course.

## 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](mailto: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/5970updates> for news, schedule changes, and announcements. These things happen.

### Week 1: Introduction to course.

Jan 06

Discussion topics:

- Introduction to course and requirements.
- What this course is and what it is not.
- How sex and gender have been considered in linguistics.

### Week 2: Using language to do gender.

Jan 13

For class, read:

1. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, Introduction and chapter 1.
2. Holmes, chapter 30 in Coates.
3. Bing and Bergvall, chapter 32 in Coates.

Discussion topics:

- Thoughts on language and gender, then and now.
- Binaries, essentialism, and the abstraction of gender.

### **Week 3: Linguistic features, terms, and methods.**

Jan 20

For class, read:

1. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, chapter 2.
2. Tannen, chapter 28 in Coates.
3. Troemel-Ploetz, chapter 29 in Coates.

Discussion topics:

- Deficit, difference, or dominance?
- Are men from Mars and women from Venus?
- Linguistic features, terms, and methods.

### **Week 4: Linguistic feature analysis; problems with gender as independent variable.**

Jan 27

For class, read:

1. Bradley, chapter 1 in Coates.
2. Trudgill, chapter 2 in Coates.
3. Podesva, Roberts, and Campbell-Kibler, chapter 12 in Cameron & Kulick.

Discussion topics:

- Gender as independent variable in sociolinguistic studies.
- Language and communities of practice.
- Analysis at the level of linguistic feature.

### **Week 5: Speaking rights; discourse and conversation analysis.**

Feb 03

For class, read:

1. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, chapter 3.
2. West and Zimmerman, chapter 11 in Coates.
3. Herring, Johnson, and DiBenedetto, chapter 14 in Coates.

Discussion topics:

- Analysis at the conversation or discourse level.
- Allocation of talk and access to the floor.
- How speaking rights can affect speaking style.

### **Week 6: Speech act theory; linguistic acts of identity and solidarity.**

Feb 10

For class, read:

1. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, chapter 4.
2. Stanley, chapter 4 in Cameron & Kulick.
3. Johnson and Aries, chapter 15 in Coates.
4. Kuiper, chapter 19 in Coates.

## **Week 6 continued**

Feb 10

Discussion topics:

- Speech act theory, or how to do things with words.
- Same-sex linguistic solidarity.
- Building community with language.

## **Week 7: Speech acts, gender, and performativity.**

Feb 17

For class, read:

1. Kiesling, chapter 10 in Cameron & Kulick.
2. Abe, chapter 11 in Cameron & Kulick.
3. Barrett, chapter 13 in Cameron & Kulick.
4. Cameron, chapter 18 in Coates.

Discussion topic:

- Using language to do gender.

## **Week 8: Midterm collaborative project presentations.**

Feb 24

Presentations of midterm collaborative projects, as scheduled.

## **Week 9: Spring break! No class.**

Mar 03

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

## **Week 10: Enacting and enforcing gender norms.**

Mar 10

For class, read:

1. Eckert, chapter 15 in Cameron & Kulick.
2. Eisikovits, chapter 4 in Coates.
3. Swann, chapter 13 in Coates.
4. Nakamura, chapter 22 in Cameron & Kulick.

Discussion topics:

- Gender norming and adolescent language.
- Linguistic enforcement of norms.

**Monday, March 16: Last day to withdraw from course (not that you'd want to).**

**Week 11: Is there “gay language” and “straight language”?**

Mar 17

For class, read:

1. Sonnenschein, chapter 3 in Cameron & Kulick.
2. Crew, chapter 5 in Cameron & Kulick.
3. Hayes, chapter 6 in Cameron & Kulick.
4. Darsey, chapter 7 in Cameron & Kulick.
5. Leap, chapter 8 in Cameron & Kulick.

Discussion topics:

- Is there “gay language” and “straight language”?
- Linguistic features, lexicon, and discourse.

**Week 12: Language and making sense; using language to organize the world.**

Mar 24

For class, read:

1. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, chapter 7.
2. Kitzinger, chapter 14 in Cameron & Kulick.
3. McConnell-Ginet, chapter 19 in Cameron & Kulick.

Discussion topics:

- The role of language in constructing and maintaining cultural and social norms.
- Legislating language, or trying to, anyway.
- Language, gender, and ways to make sense of the world.

**Week 13: Language, sex, and desire.**

Mar 31

For class, read:

1. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, chapter 6.
2. Valentine, chapter 20 of Cameron & Kulick.
3. Kulick, chapter 23 of Cameron & Kulick.

Discussion topics:

- Encoded language and assumptions about nature and sex.
- The language of desire.

**Week 14: Language variation, standardness, prestige, and style.**

April 07

For class, read:

Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, chapters 8-9.

**Week 14 continued**

April 07

Discussion topics:

- Gender, "standardness," and prestige varieties.
- Language and style.

**Week 15: Last meeting! Language, Gender, and Culture show-and-tell day.**

April 14

In preparing for class, select one of the following options:

1. Prepare a 5-minute discussion of your term-paper-in-progress. Be prepared to discuss your research question, hypothesis, sources consulted and theoretical orientation, and central argument.
2. Bring an artifact of some aspect of the relationship(s) between language, gender, sexuality, and culture and prepare a 5-minute reading or analysis of the artifact in the context of our studies this semester.

**Term papers due Friday, April 17, by 5 p.m. *Hard copies only* will be accepted.**