

***Variety in Language* – EN 5800 – Spring 2017 – T/TH 6:55-9:25 – Clark 215**

Instructor: **Benjamin Torbert**, Associate Professor of English, UM-Saint Louis
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I. Course Description

We examine English language variation in the United States from a current sociolinguistic perspective. The course covers social, regional, ethnic, gender, and style-related language variation, along with models for describing and applying knowledge about language variation. Students are exposed to a wide range of data on language variation, with particular focus on vernacular speech in American English. This course approaches American language variety primarily from academic perspectives based on the last ~ five decades of sociolinguistic research. This linguistics-based approach does not, however, preclude influences from other scholarly traditions, such as ethnography, and gender studies.

By the end of the class, students should be able (a) to recognize and use basic linguistic terminology describing English dialects, (b) to understand varying theories about the genesis of these varieties, (c) to understand the rule-governed nature of all language varieties, whether standard or nonstandard, (d) to better understand linguistic facts about language variety than is possible from following mainstream media, and (e) to understand how all language varieties display communicative competence and social value. Both EN 4830 and EN 5800 assume very little previous knowledge in linguistics; basics of linguistic terminology will be dispersed throughout the semester. We also assume that a sizeable percentage of students in the course are or later will be K-12 teachers in metropolitan Saint Louis, Missouri.

II. Texts

Reading assignments are listed on the syllabus. The reading assignment should be completed by the day on which the assignment appears on the syllabus. In other words, have it read before the class period in which we are discussing it. The texts for this course are:

- Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling Estes. 2016. *American English: Dialects and Variation*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Alim, H Samy, John R. Rickford and Arnetta F. Ball, eds. 2016. *Raciolinguistics*. New York: Oxford UP.
Lippi-Green, Rosina. 2012. *English with an Accent: Language Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*. London/New York: Routledge.
Rickford, John R. and Russell John Rickford. 2000. *Spoken Soul*. New York: Wiley and Sons.
Llamas, Carmen, et al, eds. 2007. *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*. New York: Routledge.
Anne H. Charity Hudley and Christine Mallinson. 2010. *Understanding Language Variation in US Schools*. Teachers College Press: New York.
Wierzbicka, Anna. 2014. *Imprisoned in English*. New York OUP.

In addition, relevant articles and chapters in other books will comprise a few required readings to be distributed in class. These will be about five extremely important papers from the last 45 years of sociolinguistic study. Serious students should become passingly familiar with prominent journals related to language variation such as *American Speech*, *Language in Society*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *Journal of English Linguistics*, and *Language Variation and Change*.

III. Requirements

As below. The final paper will be due the last day of class, and will be considered to be “the final.” (There will be no final exam). I will help you with bibliography.

- (1) Weekly 1-page responses to assigned reading. You are to make an incisive point about the reading. These are due at 8PM on Wednesday evenings. I'll send out an email prompt on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. At the end of the semester, you'll stick these into a single file for me to evaluate holistically. (15%)
- (2) A 750-1000-word response paper based on some topic discussed during the first third of the course (10%).
- (3) take-home midterm quiz based on reading and class discussion (20%)
- (4) 300-word abstract for final paper (5%)
- (5) A final paper of 12 to 15 pages on some topic of interest related to the course and requiring significant primary or secondary research (50%). I will encourage students displaying heightened interest in language variation to submit an abstract to NWAV in 2017, or ADS in 2018.

IV. Schedule. Subject to Change. (I will adjust this slightly and will give you sufficient notice).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Reading Assignment</i>
R 1/19	Introduction, some basic approaches	buy the books and read the syllabus
R 1/26	Interrogating common assumptions about language The reality of language variation	<i>American English</i> chapter 1 Charity/Mallinson foreword & chs 1&2
R 2/2	Language Variation: no one is exempt The instantiation of language prejudice	<i>American English</i> chapters 2 and 6 <i>English with an Accent</i> chs 1-4
R 2/9	The reinforcement of language prejudice Language & the Media	<i>English with an Accent</i> chs 5-9 <i>Spoken Soul</i> chapters 9-11
R 2/16	Linguistically subordinated groups (http://www.linguisticsociety.org/sites/default/files/Rickford_92_4.pdf)	<i>English with an Accent</i> chs 14-17 Rickford and King 2016
R 2/23	Ethnicity and American English	<i>American English</i> ch 7 ~six chapters from <i>Raciolinguistics</i> TBD
R 3/2	Region and Social Class	Routledge chs 6 <i>American English</i> chs 4-6
R 3/9	Dialect Awareness in schools & communities	<i>American English</i> chs 11-12, C-M chs 4& 5 response paper due
R 3/16	Some features in English language variation	<i>American English</i> appendix
R 3/23	Some features in English language variation	<i>American English</i> appendix abstract due
R 4/6	Walt Wolfram, guest talk	reading TBA quiz due
R 4/13	More on AAE	<i>Spoken Soul</i> Chapters 1-5, 8, 12,
R 4/20	Language & Gender	<i>American English</i> chapter 8-9 Routledge ch 7, Cameron TBA
R 4/27	Third Wave Sociolinguistics	Eckert TBA
R 5/3	Language & Style After “Global English,” what next?	Routledge chapters 7, 11-12 Wierzbicka chapters TBA
M 5/8	Final Paper Due by 5:00 PM	

V. Legal -ish Language

ACADEMIC HONESTY: As in all classes at UMSL, students must adhere to University policies about cheating and plagiarism—see http://umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student_planner/policies/conductcode.htm

CIVILITY: UMSL lists university policies about our shared responsibilities as teachers and as students for creating a positive environment for learning. Our classroom must be an intellectually safe space. Refrain from using your cell phones in any fashion during class. We also need you to display respect for your fellow students. See http://www.umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student_planner/policies/positive.htm.

ACCESS/DISABILITY: Students who have special needs must meet with the campus access office in MSC 144. If you require special accommodations, please meet with me to discuss accessibility of disability needs.

EARLY ALERT: UMSL uses an early alert system to notify students who are struggling academically.

MYGATEWAY: I will place supplemental materials on the course management system throughout the semester.