

Variety in Language – EN 4830 – Spring 2017 – TR 2:00-3:15 – Clark 415

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 focused 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 Arneha 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.

Charity-Hudley, Anne H, and Christine Mallinson. 2010. *Understanding Language Variation in US Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press: New York.

In addition, relevant articles and chapters in other books will comprise required readings to be distributed in class. These will tend to be short photocopies of the most important part of a given article and an abstract, usually.

Finally, graduate students will be expected to do a small amount of additional reading and to write short responses to several primary texts of the sociolinguistic literature. I'll assign these mid-semester.

IV. Schedule

Date Topic

Reading Assignment

T 1/17 Introductions

buy the books and read the syllabus

Sociolinguistic Preliminaries

R 1/19 Descriptive approaches to language

really just the handouts from class

T 1/24 How sociopolitical power affects language users

really just the handouts from class

R 1/26 Some basics of American Englishes – phonetics i	really just the handouts from class
T 1/31 Some basics of American Englishes – phonetics ii	really just the handouts from class
R 2/2 Some basic of American Englishes – phonetics iii	really just the handouts from class
T 2/7 Some basics of American Englishes – morphology	really just the handouts from class
T 2/9 Some basics of American Englishes – morphology ii	really just the handouts

After this, we will have a homework assignment that isn't exactly a test (10%) due 2/16

The actual readings start here. Beginning with the reading for R 2/11, I will require you to send me a four- or five-sentence precis/short reaction to each reading. These will be due at 10 before class. I will send out an email prompt to collect them the night before. This amounts to a participation grade, 20%. I'll ask you to resubmit these in a single Word document at the end of the course.

R 2/11 Dialects, "Standards," and Vernaculars	WWNS chapter 1
T 2/16 Why Variation Exists	WWNS chapter 2
T 2/18 Some more about that	
R 2/23 Language variation: no one is exempt	Lippi Chapters 1-3
T 2/25 Applications dealing with language subordination	Lippi Chapters 5, 7, 9
R 3/2 Applications dealing with language subordination	Lippi Chapters 14, 15
T 3/7 Applications dealing with language subordination	Lippi Chapters 16-17

After this, you'll have a 1000-word response paper due, on any topic early in the course (20%), due 3/9

R 3/9 Levels of dialect	<i>American English</i> chapter 3
R 3/16 National variation and regional dialects	<i>American English</i> chapters 4-5

At this point, I'm going to reassess where we are, how you guys are doing, and I'll adjust what I intend to do with the readings from Rickford/Rickford, Llamas et al, Alim et al, Charity Hudley & Mallinson.

You will write an abstract for your final paper (10%) due in late March
Your final paper will be 40% of the grade, and due at the time of the final. (No final exam)

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 accessibility or disability-related needs must meet with the campus access office in MSC 144. If you require accommodations, please meet with me.

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

MYGATEWAY: I will place supplemental materials on MyGateway throughout the semester.