

# Linguistics 220: Language and Society

## Syllabus

Northwestern University: Spring, 2003  
T/Th 11-12:20, Parkes 212

Instructor: Ralph L. Rose (r-rose@northwestern.edu)  
Cresap 102  
Tel (847) 491-7020 (Linguistics)  
Office Hours: Friday, 12-1; or by appointment

## Course Description

This course examines the ways in which relationships and structures in society influence language and vice versa. It examines variations in language that are determined by region, sex, social level, and cultural groupings. The course is intended to encourage students to think about language issues in their own lives and to help them establish positions in the light of the findings of sociolinguistic research.

## Required Texts

Mesthrie, R., Swann, J., Deumert, A., and Leap, W. (2000) *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Supplemental Readings will be provided electronically, via **Blackboard**.

## Course Requirements

- 11.1% Presentation
- 22.2% Midterm Exam
- 33.35% Research Paper
- 33.35% Final Exam
- Experiment Participation Requirement

## Guidelines and Policies

- This course will make considerable use of the **Blackboard** course management system. Students are expected to check the site regularly for announcements, news, and other documents.

- Assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of class on the date they are due. Work turned in late will be marked down one letter grade for each day late.
- All students are expected to participate in class by listening actively, asking questions, and contributing to class discussions.

## Language Notebook (optional)

In Linguistics, observations of speech in real life are crucial to the development and confirmation of hypotheses about how language works. Therefore, you are encouraged to listen carefully for good samples of sociolinguistic variation throughout your daily life. Carry with you a small notepad and jot down short snippets of speech which are interesting from a sociolinguistic point of view. You may submit in class a short "memo" for each of three separate snippets. This memo should give a description of the context, the actual snippet of speech (with transcription, as necessary), and a brief explanation of why that snippet is sociolinguistically interesting. Each memo must not be more than one page—preferably, closer to one half-page (i.e., keep it concise, no treatises!). You may turn in these three memos anytime during the quarter, but not more than one memo per week. You may receive extra credit up to a total of 10% (i.e., one letter grade) for these memos.

## Presentations

Every student will read one recent research article in the field of sociolinguistics and give a report on it in class. This report should include a description of the relevant background to the investigation, a summary of the investigation itself (i.e., subjects, method, results, etc.), the major conclusions, and some sort of reaction to the research in the form of a critique of the investigation, questions for discussion, or other. The presentation should last about fifteen minutes.

## Research Paper

In groups, students will design an investigation of a linguistic variable with respect to some social variable. Groups will gather, pool, and analyze observations from real subjects. While all of this work must be done as a group, each student must write their own research paper individually. The papers are due on the last day of class, **Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup>**.

## Experiment Participation Requirement

This course has an experimental requirement. Students may fulfill this requirement by either participating in two experiments of one hour each, or by attending two lectures of one hour each. The experiments will be part of ongoing research in the department and will illustrate features of language structure and use that are relevant to topics covered in the core linguistics curriculum. The lectures will be part of the regular speaker series organized by the Language & Cognition program. You have the option of participating in one experiment and attending one lecture. Failure to complete this requirement will result in a lowered course grade. The penalty is one-third of a grade for each credit short of the requirement.

## Schedule

- 1 Apr** *What is Sociolinguistics?*
- 3 Apr** *Fundamentals of Sociolinguistics; Variation and change* Mesthrie, et al, Chap 1,4
- 8 Apr** *Language and geography I* Mesthrie, et al, Chap 2
- 10 Apr** *Language and geography II* Wolfram and Fasold, 1974;
- 15 Apr** *Language and social class* Mesthrie, et al, Chap 3
- 17 Apr** *Language and ethnic group* Fishman, 1989; Trudgill, 2001
- 22 Apr** *Language and gender* Mesthrie, et al, Chap 7
- 24 Apr** *Language and age* Eckert, 1997
- 29 Apr** Midterm
- 1 May** *Language and interaction I* Mesthrie, et al, Chap 6
- 6 May** *Language and interaction II* TBA
- 8 May** *Politeness and insults* Wardaugh, 1992
- 13 May** *Language and culture* Whorf, 1939
- 15 May** *Multilingualism* Mesthrie, et al, Chap 5
- 20 May** *Attitudes toward language* Fasold, 1984
- 22 May** *Language contact* Mesthrie, et al, Chaps 8,9
- 27 May** *Language and power* Mesthrie, et al, Chap 10
- 29 May** *Language education, planning, and policy* Mesthrie, et al, Chaps 11,12 (*paper due*)
- 12 Jun** Final Exam, 12-2 p.m.