

The Study of Culture Through Language

Anthropology 215

Dr. Nell Haynes

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1810 Hinman Av. Office 209
Lecture-M&W, 9:30-10:50
Office Hours-M&W, 11:00-12:30
or by appointment

Teaching Assistants

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Course Description

Language is universally practiced by humans, but commonsense understandings about language, its appropriate use, and its inherent qualities vary widely both between and within societies. Using the anthropological method of comparative, cross-cultural, qualitative analysis, this course looks both within and outside our own society to ask basic questions about the relationship between language, culture, and society. We explore the dynamics of everyday talk as well as the social and political forces that shape the ways we talk and evaluate others' speech. How does language shape collective culture and individual thought, and how do culture and thought shape language? How do adults use language to help children become culturally competent? The course discusses topics including formulaic language, language acquisition and socialization, language and identity, language ideologies, language and politics, and methods in linguistic anthropology. It includes two ethnographies and a number of academic articles. Assessment is based on participation, daily quizzes, and four essays.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

1. understand human diversity and similarity
2. understand key topics and methodological approaches in linguistic anthropology
3. understand the foundational concepts for different textual analysis
4. enhance their creative, critical, and informed thinking about language and culture
5. understand of the interdisciplinary nature of linguistic anthropological research
6. conduct analysis using a variety of styles
7. engage with the significance of theoretical debates regarding the relationships among language, culture, and power

Requirements

Quizzes	20%	Ongoing
Leading Discussion	10%	Ongoing
Participation	10%	Ongoing
Paper 1	15%	29 January
Paper 2	15%	12 February
Paper 3	15%	26 February
Paper 4	15%	12 March

*Students are responsible for all material in the readings, lectures, and audiovisual presentations in class. Readings should be completed before the day for which they are assigned. It is crucial to link the ideas in readings to those in lectures and discussions. Students are encouraged to participate in lectures and sections. The only bad questions are (1) unasked questions and (2) “Is this going to be on the exam?”

* Student attendance at lectures is mandatory. At the beginning of each class period there will be a short (1-3 question) quiz. The questions will be easy to answer for students who have done the readings. Quizzes will be graded with the points 0 (clearly didn’t read), 1 (partial knowledge of reading), or 2 (good reading comprehension). Quizzes also serve as a way of recording attendance, so punctuality is key. Quizzes will be given in 13 class periods, but only account for 20% of the grade. This means students will be given 3 “free” quizzes. They either have 3 “excused” absences from lectures or if they have not read thoroughly their score will not affect their overall grade. In case of absence, students should consult each other about lecture notes rather than asking the TA or professor what they missed.

*Student attendance and participation in discussion sections are mandatory. In addition to regular participation in the discussion section, each student will present readings and guide group discussion for one class during the quarter. This will be approximately a 15 minute presentation, along with the following discussion.

*No late papers will be excepted without medical documentation.

*In the case of any major medical or other type of attendance issue, please speak with the professor during office hours if at all possible. If not possible, please communicate by email. Be advised that doing so early is key to creating a workable solution to problems. Last-minute emails will not be met with sympathy.

About Attendance and Participation

Anthropology is a discipline that is constantly in motion, building off of old ideas and incorporating new ones, so questions, discussion, and critique is welcome. We will practice applying the ideas of the authors we read to new situations and contexts. The class will be expected to offer opinions and examples, and pose challenges to some of what we discuss. Stereotypes and prejudices often exist in reference to material that is new, unusual, and foreign. Our challenge is to become aware of these stereotypes and to question our assumptions

so that our ability to analyze and understand new material is not impaired by our biases. This is an important time to explore ideas and learn new ways of understanding the world. Therefore participation is not only part of the final grade, but will also be necessary to building the kind of understanding required to successfully complete other assignments. To make sure you are in the best possible position to get a good participation grade:

1. Complete the required reading. You do not need to worry that you understand absolutely everything you read, but take notes about parts that strike you as especially intriguing, important, or disconnected. Think about how it relates to things you have experienced in different contexts. Think about when it was written and by whom. Think about whether you agree or disagree and why.
2. Be prepared to ask questions. Whether they are about something you don't understand in the reading, or are simply about how other people reacted to a specific detail, questions help move class discussion along.
3. Be open to new ideas. Anthropology often challenges our assumptions about the world. Newer readings in anthropology often challenge older ideas that were common in anthropology. And hopefully, you will even challenge some of the readings that you think miss the point. You don't have to agree with everything that you read or hear, but take the time to think about it carefully before you decide. Or allow yourself to not decide. But most importantly, be respectful to all the opinions offered in class, and think about why someone might agree or disagree with them.
4. Participate in ways that are productive. Please remember that you may have a funny story related to the class discussion, but unless it advances our thinking on an anthropological topic, your anecdote might not move discussion in a productive manner.
5. Be respectful. Perhaps most importantly, respecting the classroom, your fellow classmates, and the instructor will help you succeed. Paying attention to the discussion and finding thoughtful ways to contribute will make everyone's experience more pleasant.

***IMPORTANT CONTENT NOTE** A key part of linguistic anthropology is interrogating the ways that inequalities are created, maintained, and at times disrupted through language. As such, some readings describe this type of language—language that is offensive by its very nature. Rather than shying away from offensive language, it is the job of linguistic anthropologists to interrogate the ways it is embedded with and maintains power relations. Some of this language may make you uncomfortable, but confronting it is part of the important work of linguistic anthropology and cannot be ignored. This being said, when discussing readings that make reference to offensive language, please take the utmost care in respecting others and doing your best not to reproduce the power inherent in certain utterances related to race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability, or any other type of social inequality.

Laptop Policy

No laptops are to be used during class time, unless arranged through accessibility accommodations. Students who generally read digital copies are therefore encouraged to bring their notes in hard copy.

Grading Standards

- A Superior: Student shows excellent critical analysis in oral contributions and writing; all assignments turned in on time. 90-100 (A+ 100, A 93-99, A- 90-92)
- B Very Good: Solid work evidenced by careful synthesis of reading, timely contributions to class discussion, and clear, logical writing; all assignments turned in on time. 80-90 (B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82)
- C Satisfactory: Work demonstrates some understanding of materials and an average performance in written assignments and class discussion; all assignments turned in on time. 70-80 (C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72)
- D Inconsistent: Meager performance in all assignments and class discussion; late in turning in written work. 60-70
- F Failing: Student makes minimal effort, shows little understanding of assignments, and turns in incomplete or unacceptable work. Below 60

If you have a major medical problem or family concern that requires you to miss several classes, please provide documentation and we will do our best to help you stay involved. Additionally, please make every effort to come to class on time so as not to disrupt discussion once it has begun. Leaving early is also disruptive, so please limit bathroom breaks and leave class early only when absolutely necessary, providing a reason beforehand.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is strictly forbidden. All work you turn in must be your own. This means no borrowing of ideas or wording from friends' work, other author's work, or the Internet. Any time another person's work is used, it absolutely MUST be cited properly. Suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to the Dean's office. For more information on Northwestern's academic integrity policies see www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/handbook/integrity. Student work may also be checked using electronic databases.

Academic Accommodations

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Required Reading

Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society by Lila Abu-Lughod
Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity and the Politics of Place by Gabriela Galia Modan
Additional Readings on Canvas

Course Schedule

Week 1 Foundations

8 January Course Introduction

10 January *Alessando Duranti. 2003. "The Scope of Linguistic Anthropology" in Linguistic Anthropology. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

No Discussion Section

Week 2 Language and Ethnography

15 January NO CLASS, MLK DAY

17 January *Lila Abu-Lughod. 1986. Chapters 1-2 in Veiled Sentiments. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Discussion sections begin-you will receive a specific schedule, according to your section

Week 3 Language and Power

22 January *Chapters 3-5 in Veiled Sentiments

24 January *Chapters 6-8 in Veiled Sentiments

Week 4 Communities & Language

29 January *Elinor Ochs and Bambi B. Schieffelin. 1994. "Language Acquisition and Socialization: Three Developmental Stories and their Implications." In Shweder and LeVine (eds.) Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion. NY: Cambridge, 276-320.

31 January *Bucholtz, Mary. 1999. "Why Be Normal?": Language and Identity Practices in Community of Nerd Girls. Language in Society 28(2): 203-223.
ESSAY 1 DUE (3-4pp, assigned Jan 24)

Week 5 Language Ideology

5 February *Barrett, Rusty. 2006. Language ideology and racial inequality: Competing functions of Spanish in an Anglo-owned Mexican restaurant. *Language in Society* 35(2):163–204.

7 February *Moriarty Harrelson, Erin. 2017. “Deaf people with “no language”: Mobility and flexible accumulation in languaging practices of deaf people in Cambodia,” *Applied Linguistics Review*.

Week 6 Language and Identity

12 February *Heller, Monica. 2003. “Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7(4): 473–492.

14 February *Blommaert, Jan. 2009. “Language, Asylum, and the National Order,” *Current Anthropology* 50(4):415-441. *You do not need to read the comments or reply sections.*

ESSAY 2 DUE (3-4pp, assigned Feb 7)

Week 7 Linguistic Anthropology in Action

19 February *Laura Ahearn. 2012. *The Research Process in Linguistic Anthropology*. In *Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*. Malden MA: Blackwell.

21 February NO CLASS (but read Modan, Gabriella Gahlia. 2007. Chapters 1-2 in *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place*. Malden, MA: Blackwell).

Week 8 Discourse & Diversity

26 February Modan, Gabriella Gahlia. 2007. Chapters 3-4 in *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

28 February Chapters 5-7 in *Turf Wars*

Week 9 Conversation Analysis

5 March Conversation Analysis Lecture and Examples
DUE: 2 minutes of (simple) transcription of a conversation (details on handout)

7 March Conversation Analysis
DUE: transcription with conversation analysis symbols

Week 10 Finishing up

12 March Overview of important concepts, assigning of final essay
ESSAY 3 DUE (3-4pp) Discourse Analysis essay

FINALS WEEK

21 March Final Essay Due by midnight Conversation Analysis