

Language and Identity

Humanities Seminars Program Fall 2022

Dr. Grace E. Fielder

All lectures and discussions are conducted in English.

Seminar Description

In this course we will explore the relationship between language and identity, that is, how individual and group identities interact with directly observable language use in everyday lives. Language can be used to indicate belonging/not belonging to a particular community, and this “self vs. other” distinction is both produced by speakers and interpreted by listeners. One of the major goals of sociolinguistics is to discover how specific “ways of speaking” become associated with particular groups of people, and how “ways of speaking” can be deployed not only to construct the speaker’s own identity but also to project identity on others.

Language was a critical part of the process of 19th century nation-building in which a “people” could be identified and thus assigned to a specific geographic territory, while in the 20th and 21st centuries the disintegration of empires has resulted in new nations and “new” languages. The disintegration of the USSR into a post-colonial landscape is one salient example. Pronoun use has become a hotly debated issues as well. Norwegian dictionaries will soon have a new gender-neutral pronoun "hen" in addition to the masculine "han" and feminine "hun". Despite the fact that the pronoun “they” has been used in English literature as a singular pronoun since the 14th century, today it is often seen as an abberation and a sign of the corruption of the English language. Are such controversies truly just about language? If language reflects how we perceive and understand the world around us, does changing language then actually change how we perceive and understand the world and others in it?

This course recognizes language as a lens through which a variety of phenomena in the social, political and cultural life of humans around the world can be explored. Because language is so often taken for granted, many of the ways in which it is deployed for identity work are often invisible. Upon closer examination, however, there are definite patterns that emerge and provide insights not only into language but into human nature itself. Seeking out these patterns between language and identity will be our goal as we read about different language issues and use different theoretical lenses to better understand them. Topics to be investigated include how language intersects with gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, age and class in a variety of contexts including everyday interaction, advertising, political speech, social media and literature.

The class format will be primarily discussion of the assigned readings with some short presentations on specific topics. Each week students will submit by email a written discussion question based on the readings 24 hours before the class meeting time. In addition each student will bring to class for discussion a real life example of the interaction of language and identity

that they have observed or read about (for example, an illustration of one of the topics from the readings).

The following readings represent the “game plan” and are subject to change depending on a variety of factors including new developments in the real world as well as student interests.

For the first day of class, please write a linguistic autobiography of about a page (guidelines are provided in the “Linguistic Autobiography Assignment” in Week One Folder).

Week One: Language & National Identity

1. Buck, Carl Darling. 1916. “Language and the Sentiment of Nationality.” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Feb., 1916), pp. 44-69. [25 pages]
2. Haugan, E. 1966. Dialect, Language, Nation. *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Aug., 1966), pp. 922-935. [13 pages]
3. Trubetzkoy, N. 1991[1923]. “The Ukrainian Problem.” *The Legacy of Genghis Khan and other Essays on Russia’s Identity*. Michigan Slavic Publications, pp. 245-267. [23 pages]
4. Lunt, H. 1959 The Creation of Standard Macedonian: Some Facts and Attitudes. *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 1, No. 5, pp. 19-26. [8 pages]

Recommended

Vladimir Putin 2021. "On The Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians".
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> [17 pages]

Week Two: Pronouns

1. Pennebaker, J. et al. 2003. “Psychological Aspects of Natural Language Use: Our Words, Our Selves.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 54, pp. 547-77. [30 pages]
2. Adams, J. & R. Harré. 2001. “Gender Positioning: A Sixteenth/Seventeenth Century Example.” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 31:3, pp. 331-338. [7 pages]
3. Friedrich, P. 1972. “Social Context and Semantic Feature: The Russian Pronominal Usage.” *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, pp. 270-300. [30 pages]

Recommended:

Miyazaki, A. 2004. Japanese Junior High School Girls’ and Boy’s First-Person Pronoun Use and Their Social World. *Japanese Language, Gender and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, pp. 256-274.

Week Three: Gender

1. Chapter 1 from Danesi 2018 *Of Cigarettes, High Heels, and Other Interesting Things: An Introduction to Semiotics*. Springer [23 pages].
2. Ochs, E. 1992. "Indexing Gender." In Duranti, A & C. Goodwin (eds.) *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge U Press, 1992, pp 335-358. [20 pages]
3. Kiesling, S. 2007. “Men, Masculinities and Language.” *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1.6: 653-673. [20 pages]

4. Inoue 2004 What Does Language Remember? Indexical Inversion and the Naturalized History of Japanese Women. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, pp. 39–56 [17 pages]

Week Four: Race & Ethnicity

1. Alim, H. Samy & G. Smitherman. 2012. “A.W.B. Articulate While Black.” In *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, language, and race in the U.S.*, pp. 31-63. [32 pages]
2. Bucholtz, M. & Lopez, Q. 2011. “Performing blackness, forming whiteness: Linguistic minstrelsy in Hollywood film.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15.5: 680–706. [26 [pages]
3. Hill, J. 1995. “Junk Spanish, Covert Racism, and the (Leaky) Boundary between Public and Private Spheres.” *Pragmatics* 5.1: 197-212. [15 pages]
4. Slobe 2018. Style, stance, and Social Meaning in Mock White Girl. *Language in Society* 47, 541–567. [27 pages]

Week Five: Accents & Dialects

1. Johnstone, B. 2013. “Ideology and discourse in the enregisterment of regional variation” *Space in Language and Linguistics : Geographical, Interactional, and Cognitive Perspectives*, edited by Peter Auer, et al.,pp. 107-126. [21 pages]
2. Bell, A. 2011. “Falling in love again and again: Marlene Dietrich and the iconization of non-native English.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15.5, pp. 627–656. [30 pages]
3. Lippi-Green, R. 2011. “Teaching Children How to Discriminate.” In *English with an Accent*, pp. 101-129 [29 pages]