

Linguistics 113
Language Diversity in the USA:
Regional, Social and Ethnic Dialects
MWF 11:15-12:05, Dickinson 114

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Course website: <http://courses.umass.edu/ling113/>

Purposes of the course

- * To lay the background for understanding what conditions lead to the creation of dialects (through linguistic change), and what social circumstances lead to variation in dialect use within a specific regional dialect area.
- * To show that the linguistic changes which produce dialect differences are systematic and rule-governed, due to the human language faculty.
- * To provide a forum in which students' knowledge of their own and other dialects may emerge and contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of dialect use and attitudes towards it, and to provide experience in carrying out research on dialects.
- * Specific topics include how accents affect how people view each other, differences among the major US dialect regions, including the North, Midland, South, and West, with a focus on the Eastern New England dialect, and a detailed examination of various aspects of the syntax and semantics of African American English.

Required Textbook

There is a textbook: *American English: Dialects and Variation*, by Walt Wolfram & Natalie Schilling-Estes, Second Edition. It is available at *Food for Thought Books* in downtown Amherst.

Requirements for the course

- 30% Homework assignments and research survey reports to be submitted in class. *No late assignments will be accepted.* We will drop one homework grade.
- 30% Quizzes to be taken on online using WebCT.
- 30% Group R-Dropping Project—individual write-up
- 10% Active class participation, i.e. comments and questions in class and in group discussions.
- ◆ Attendance bonus: If you miss no more than four classes, you will receive a 5% bonus to your total grade.

WebCT

This is a *WebCT course*, which means that information and materials relevant to this course will be available online through a program called *WebCT*, managed by the UMass Office of Information Technologies (OIT). You will be able to log on to WebCT to view and print readings, lectures, and homeworks. You will be *required* to take certain quizzes and surveys through WebCT for this course. Try logging onto WebCT over the weekend, and report on whether you were successful next Monday.

- ◆ Go to WebCT: <https://webct.oit.umass.edu/>
- ◆ Use Secure Socket logon for all aspects of WebCT.
- ◆ WebCT is free, but an active OIT computing account (NetID) is a requirement for all WebCT course use.
- ◆ WebCT uses your normal OIT user name and password.
 - ◆ Students must be officially registered in a course using WebCT AND have an active OIT computing account (NetID) to be enrolled in their WebCT course components. Students are added to WebCT courses each business day (M-F) around 8am based on registrar (and OIT computing account) data from 1:00 am the same business day.)

Course webpage

There is also a *course webpage*. Just in case you're unable to log on to WebCT, you can get some course-related information and materials from the course webpage, including the syllabus, readings, homeworks, and course bibliography. *You cannot take quizzes on the webpage.*

- ◆ Go to the course webpage: <http://courses.umass.edu/ling113/>

University Policy concerning Academic Honesty

The integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research. Academic honesty is therefore required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

- ◆ *Cheating*: intentional use, and/or attempted use of trickery, artifice, deception, breach of confidence, fraud and/or misrepresentation of one's academic work.
- ◆ *Fabrication*: intentional and unauthorized falsification and/or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise.
- ◆ *Plagiarism*: knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise. This includes submitting without citation, in whole or in part, prewritten term papers of another or the research of another, including but not limited to commercial vendors who sell or distribute such materials.
- ◆ *Facilitating dishonesty*: knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty, including substituting for another in an examination, or allowing others to represent as their own one's papers, reports, or academic works.

Sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty.

Selected bibliography

- Carver, Craig M. 1987. *American Regional Dialects: A Word Geography*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Green, Lisa J. 2002. *African-American English: A Linguistic Introduction*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press.
- Kurath, Hans. 1949. *Word Geography of the Eastern United States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Labov, William, Sharon Ash, & Charles Boberg, eds. 2005. *Phonological Atlas of North America*. New York: Mouton/Walter de Gruyter, Inc.
- Rickford, John R. and Russell J. Rickford 2000 *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- TELSUR Project. <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phonoatlas>.
- Wolfram, Walt & Natalie Schilling-Estes. 2006. *American English: Dialects and Variation*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Schedule of topics and assignments

Introduction to the Course

Wed. Sept. 7 Review of plans for the course, students fill out and hand in *Linguistics 113 Initial Questionnaire*

Fri. Sept 9 – Wed. Sept 14 Introduction to the course through viewing and close discussion of PBS video *American Tongues* **Reading Assignment**: WSE (=Wolfram and Schilling-Estes *American English*, 2nd ed.) Chap. 1 and Ch. 2 through p. 45.

Fri. Sept. 16. Discussion of WSE Chap. 1 on notions of dialect and standard language and popular conceptions of these. **Assignment due**: Hand in a two part written response to the film *American Tongue*. In the first part, explain the lesson(s) that you personally took away from this film. What did you learn from this film? In the second part, give a critical response to the film. What do you think the goal of the film was? What do you think the film could have done better? What would you have liked to learn from it that you didn't? (600 words)

Regional Dialects: Vocabulary

Mon. Sept. 19- Fri Sept. 23 Reading assignment: WSE Ch 3.1, 3.2, Ch. 5 pp. 134-147. Mapping dialects on the basis of words, finding the *isoglosses*. Early Linguistic Atlas findings concerning the basic dialect regions in the U.S. More recent results from *The Dictionary of American Regional English*. Designing and conducting dialect surveys. Is slang a dialect? Conduct a dialect survey with three individuals from different towns in Massachusetts, and hand in results (=Assignment due **Friday Sept. 23**). Results to be compiled in class.

Regional Dialects : Phonology

Mon. Sept. 26. The most recent results (mid 1990's) on dialect regions from the *Phonological Atlas of North America*. The early formation of dialect regions. **Reading Assignment:** WSE Ch. 4.1, 4.2. The history of r-dropping in the U.S., and changes in prestige of this dialect feature. Conducting research on the status/prestige of r-dropping.

Wed. Sept. 28 A linguistic analysis of r-dropping. Predicting where *r* can and cannot drop. Practice with doing empirical research on the r-dropping rules. Problem set on *r*-dropping handed out.

Fri. Sept 30 Discussion of **two r-dropping assignments due:** (i) write-up on changes in prestige of r-dropping based on research conducted (one page type-written) and (ii) exercise practicing the *r*-dropping rules due.

Mon. Oct. 3-Wed. Oct. 5 Further discussion of the phonological differences between the major U.S. dialect groups—Northern, Midland and Southern. **Reading assignment:** WSE Ch. 3.3., Ch. 4.3-4.5, Ch. 5, pp. 147-153. Major recent phonological changes in progress. Listening tests with dialect samples showing lack of intelligibility between U.S. dialects for words pronounced in isolation. **Assignment due Wed. Oct. 12:** report on research on E. Mass. pronunciation of *can, cot, caught, bother, father*.

Fri. Oct. 7. In class viewing of *Yeah You Rite*, a film on the complicated dialect picture of New Orleans, which reflects the many social and cultural distinctions in the city: Cajun flavored English, Brooklynese and more.

Monday Oct. 10= Holiday

Regional dialects: Attitudes and Perceptions

Wed. Oct. 12 Discussion of *Yeah You Rite*, of attitudes towards various social dialects depicted in film. Perceptual dialectology—views on dialect dependent on region of origin. **Reading assignment** WSE Ch. 5.5 Research assignment (due Fri. Oct. 14)—replication of perceptual dialectology study using students from MA, NYC and NJ.

Fri. Oct. 14. (The phonology of *dese, dem, dose*. The phonology of final consonant cluster reduction.) Review for **QUIZ on regional dialects**.

QUIZ #1 on regional dialects, taken through WebCT. To be completed by Sun Oct. 16, 4pm.

Social and Ethnic Dialects

Mon. Oct. 17 Compilation and discussion of results of perceptual dialectology study. Dialect variation and social class. **Reading assignment:** WSE Ch. 6.1, , Ch. 9.2.1

Wed. Oct. 19 Reading assignment WSE Ch. 6.2, 6.3 Beyond class, jocks and burnouts, phonological patterning of social differences.

Fri. Oct. 21 Discussion of social evaluation of particular linguistic features from EMass and NYC dialects. Discussion of homework exercises. **Reading assignment:** WSE Ch 6.5, 6.6. **Homework assignment due:** Exercises 1&2, WSE Ch.6

Mon. Oct. 24 Reading assignment WSE Ch. 6.7. Ethnicity-based differences in the Boston dialect

Dialects and Style

Wed. Oct. 26, Fri. Oct. 28 Variation in the use of dialects within individuals, as a function of attention to speech, audience, presentation of self. **Reading assignment** WSE Ch. 9, Wm. Labov on social stratification of phonological features of dialect. **Homework assignment due Friday:** Report of observations of variation in use of features of African American English according to social context by lead figure in film *School Daze*—excerpts available on class website. (2 pages)

QUIZ #2 on Social Factors in Language Variation up on WebCT, to be completed by Sun Oct. 30, 4pm.

Group Research Projects on Variation in R-Dropping with Individual Speakers from Eastern Massachusetts: Oct. 31-Nov. 30.

- Group meetings every Monday devoted to work on this project.
- **Mon. Oct. 31: The R-Dropping Project explained, schedule of work outlined.**
- **Wed. Nov. 30: Class Presentation of results of research projects.**

African American Language and African American Vernacular English

Wed Nov.2 -Fri. Nov. 4 Verbal Art in the African American community **Reading assignment:** WSE Ch. 7 211-218, Rickford & Rickford *Spoken Soul*, Ch. 3, Ch. 5
(**Homework:** R-dropping exercise due on Friday)

Mon. Nov. 7-Friday Nov. 18 Syntactic and semantic features of African American English. The grammatical system of a vernacular dialect examined in depth. **Reading Assignment:** Green *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*, Ch. 3, Ch. 4. The history and origins of African American English **Reading Assignment:** WSE Ch. 7.2. **Homework exercises** on features of AAE **due Monday Nov. 14 and Monday Nov. 21.**

Friday Nov. 11 = Holiday

Mon. Nov. 21 Issues of language and identity in the African American community. **Reading assignment:** Rickford & Rickford *Spoken Soul* Final chapter “The Crucible of Identity”.

Wed, Nov. 23 In class viewing of documentary footage on language in the African American community

Thanksgiving Vacation

Mon. Nov. 28. R-dropping research groups meet to discuss final presentation. **Papers handed in.** Review session for quiz on AAE.

Wed. Nov. 30 Presentation in class of results of R-dropping projects.

Fri. Dec. 2. Applying understanding of dialects to education. **Reading Assignment:** WSE, Ch. 10, Ch. 11

QUIZ #3 on African American English up on WebCT. To be completed by Sunday Dec. 4 at 4pm.

Language and Gender

Mon. Dec. 5- Mon. Dec. 12 **Reading Assignment:** WSE Ch. 8. **Final Assignment** TBA, due Mon. Dec 12..

Last day of this class: Monday December 12.