

Language and Culture

Anthropology 335, Spring 2006

Course Description:

Language is a primary cultural tool used in all human societies. Through the use of language, we interact socially, interpret our surroundings, set up relations and establish shared meanings. Language use creates public space and places items into that space for consideration. In short, there is no such thing as non-social language; language itself is fundamentally a social activity integrally linked with cultural systems and social practice. In this course, we will examine this intersection of language and culture in an effort to understand how language and culture derive from, shape, and influence each other.

Questions we will consider include the following: How does language produce meaning? What is culture and what is the role of language in its study? How do identities emerge from discursive interaction? How does language realize relations of power? How does language interact with gender and ethnicity? What is the impact of language in the mass media and politics? How does language tie in with nationalism and national identity?

The course will use a seminar format as we navigate these questions. This means students are expected to come fully prepared to discuss the weekly readings in an interactive setting. The course topic, Language and Culture, should also be seen as a vehicle for the practice of critical thinking, reading, writing and discussion. Anthropology has given us a way to step outside our own cultural reference points in order to examine diverse cultures on their own terms. Similarly, scholarly inquiry requires stepping outside our usual frames of reference to examine issues from various angles. In order to critically evaluate ideas, we must first understand those ideas on the terms laid out by authors and classmates. Students are encouraged to try on ideas and examine topics from different angles, to challenge ideas and rethink their own positions throughout the semester as we engage in a collaborative process of scholarly inquiry into language and culture.

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:00 – 5:00pm and 8:00 – 9:00pm in Clark B266/267

Course Website: The full syllabus is posted on WebCT. You will need to login to access readings, your grades, and additional course information.

Books and Readings:

- Duranti, Alessandro. 1997. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press (ISBN 0 521 44993 6). (Noted as LA on schedule.)
- Haeri, Niloufar. 2003. *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*. Palgrave MacMillan (ISBN 0 312 23897 5).
- Additional readings will be placed on E-Reserve (noted as ER on schedule) and on WebCT (noted as WCT on schedule.)

Grade Requirements

Weekly Journal Entries: 25% of course grade

One of the most effective ways to think through ideas and organize thoughts is to write. The journal you are required to keep for the course is a place to “think out loud on paper.” Ideally, you will write down reflections as they arise while doing the readings and jot down ideas as they come to you throughout the week. Your journal is a place to identify questions you are particularly interested in exploring further, work through difficult passages of readings, and reflect on ideas brought up in class discussions. It is not intended to be a polished, well-edited manuscript to be read by others. Rather, it is more like stream of consciousness writing where you place your fingers on the keyboard (or pick up a pen) and write what you’re thinking without regard to correct

punctuation/grammar or consistent style. That is, write without hesitation or pausing to recollect thoughts and without immediately rereading or editing what you put down on paper. Through your journaling during the semester, you should be able to build upon and organize particular ideas that interest you for the final paper. Consistent and effective journal writing will also allow you to participate more fully in class discussions because you will have thought through the readings and reflected on their links with previous discussions.

Format: Journals should be typed, entries dated, and placed together in a binder. Weekly entries should total at least 2-3 double-spaced pages (i.e. at least 800 words.) A total of 10 weeks worth of entries are needed by **April 5** when journals are collected for the last time and final journal grades are determined.

Assessment: Journals will be collected several times throughout the semester (Feb 8, March 8, April 5) and will receive both a QUANTITY and QUALITY grade. The QUANTITY grade stems from the number of weekly entries completed; 10 points are awarded for each week to arrive at a total of 100 points (when all 10 required weekly entries are present.) The QUALITY grade is determined as follows. Each time journals are collected, one week's entry (or entries) is selected at random to be read. Disregarding punctuation/grammar/style, a grade out of 100 points will be awarded based on the effort and thought put into that week's journaling. The three QUALITY grades will be averaged together at the end of the semester. The final journal grade, therefore, includes 100 points for QUANTITY and 100 points for QUALITY or a total of 200 points towards the final course grade.

Group Presentations: 25% of course grade

Each student (as part of a group) is responsible for presenting and facilitating discussion on **two** readings during the semester. This requires providing the class with an overview of the reading's key ideas and your considered reflections on them (~20-30 minutes), and then engaging the class with questions and facilitating discussion (~20-30 minutes) as we examine the issues. A handout or some other type of audio-visual aid is required, and a typed outline (see form on WebCT) needs to be turned in to the instructor on the day of the presentation. Groups are encouraged to be creative in how they approach and engage in their presentation.

Assessment: Grades will take into account group, peer and instructor evaluations. Each presentation is worth 100 points so that each student's presentation grade totals 200 points toward the final course grade.

Final Paper: 25% of course grade

The final paper should reflect what you have learned about language and culture during the semester. As such, the paper topic should engage with ideas and authors discussed in the course. Beyond this stipulation, the specific topic is open to any issue in the study of language and culture that you are particularly interested in exploring further. The length should be approximately 5 – 10 double spaced pages; but the main length requirement is that you cover your stated topic in a manner that is convincing and well-written. The paper should engage with at least five scholarly sources from class and/or outside research and document these sources with in-text citations and a list of works cited at the end.

The final paper should be thought of as a semester long process, not simply as a one or two week assignment. Start thinking about ideas early on in the semester (journal entries are a good place to explore thoughts.) Also, please make use of my office hours to discuss potential topics and inform me of the topic you eventually choose. Once you have chosen a topic for your final paper, the formal writing involves the following stages/requirements.

Draft and peer review. Everyone will need to pair up with a peer reviewer (we will work this out in class by April 12.) Each student will then turn in a draft to their peer reviewer on **April 19**. Reviewers will make comments on the draft and discuss suggestions for revisions with their partners by **April 26**.

Final draft. The final version of the paper will be turned in on **May 3**. In addition to the final, polished (i.e. well-edited and spell-checked) version of the paper, a copy of the draft with reviewer comments also needs to be turned in to receive credit for those steps.

Assessment: The final paper will receive a grade out of 100 points based on the quality of work, i.e. how well the writer defines a thesis and engages with ideas from the course. In

addition, the draft and peer review process will receive 100 points so that the final paper grade is worth 200 points toward the final course grade.

Preparation and Participation: 25% of course grade

Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the material. In order to participate in class discussions, attendance is obviously necessary. This participation grade will be awarded at the end of the semester based on a combination of attendance, preparation, and participation in the class during the semester. This is worth 200 points towards the final course grade.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Jan 18	Introduction to language and culture
Jan 25	Language 1: "The scope of linguistic anthropology" (LA pgs.1-22) 2: "Linguistic diversity" (LA pgs.51-83)
Feb 1	1: "Speaking as social action" (LA pgs.214-244) 2: "Theories of meaning," Taylor (pgs.248-273 only) (ER)
Feb 8	Culture 1: "Theories of culture" (LA pgs.23-50) 2: "Dialogic emergence of culture," Mannheim & Tedlock (ER) —Turn in journals
Feb 15	1: "Language and culture," Salzman (ER) 2: "Conclusions" (LA pgs.331-339)
Feb 22	Identity and interaction 1: "Identity and interaction," Bucholtz & Hall (WCT) 2: "Linguistic resources for socializing humanity," Ochs (ER)
March 1	1: "'Why be normal?': Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls," Bucholtz (WCT) 2: "The 'Father Knows Best' dynamic in dinnertime narratives," Ochs and Taylor (ER)
March 8	Gender, identity and language 1: "Fashioning selves," Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (ER) 2: "Lip service on the fantasy lines," Hall (ER) —Turn in journals
March 15	Spring Break
March 22	Language and power 1: "Defining Reality: A Powerful Tool," Spender (ER) 2: "Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals," Cohn (WCT)
March 29	1: "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse," Hall (ER) 2: "Ideology," Blommaert (ER) 3: "Language, Struggle and Voice:The Bakhtin/Volosinov Writings," Maybin (ER)
April 5	Language, media, and politics 1: "The social circulation of media discourse and the mediation of communities," Spitulnik (ER)

- 2: "Language, race and white public space," Hill (ER)
—Turn in journals (final journal grade)
- April 12 **Language and the nation-state**
 1: "Introduction", "Cultural roots", Anderson (WCT)
 2: "The origins of national consciousness," Anderson (ER)
- April 19 **Language and culture in Egypt**
Sacred Language, Ordinary People, Haeri (Preface through Chap. 2)
—Paper draft due to peer reviewer
- April 26 *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*, Haeri (Chaps. 3-4)
—Peer review comments due to author
- May 3 *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*, Haeri (Chaps. 5-end)
—Final paper due (along with draft and review comments)

Bibliography of Course Readings

- Anderson, Benedict. 1991 [1983]. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso.
- Blommaert, Jan. 2005. "Ideology." In *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*, pgs. 158-202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bucholtz, Mary. 1999. "Why be normal?: Language and Identity Practices in a Community of Nerd Girls." *Language in Society* 28: 203-223.
- Bucholtz, Mary and Kira Hall. 2005. "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach." *Discourse Studies* 7(4-5): 585-614.
- Cohn, Carol. 1987. "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs* 12(4): 687-718.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 1997. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eckert, Penelope and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2003. "Fashioning Selves." In *Language and Gender*, pgs. 305-332. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haeri, Niloofar. 2003. *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hall, Kira. 1995. "Lip Service on the Fantasy Lines." In Kira Hall and Mary Bucholtz (eds) *Gender Articulated*, pgs. 183-216. New York: Routledge.
- Hall, Stuart. 2001. "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse." In Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, pgs. 72-81. London: Sage.
- Hill, Jane. 2001. "Language, Race and White Public Space." In Alessandro Duranti (ed) *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, pgs. 450-464. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Maybin, Janet. 2001. "Language, Struggle and Voice: The Bakhtin/Volosinov Writings." In Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, pgs. 64-71. London: Sage.

- Ochs, Elinor. 1996. "Linguistic Resources for Socializing Humanity." In John Gumperz and Stephen Levinson (eds) *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, pgs. 407-432.
- Ochs, Elinor and Carolyn Taylor. 2001. "The 'Father Knows Best' Dynamic in Dinnertime Narratives." In Alessandro Duranti (ed) *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, pgs. 431-449. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Salzman, Zdenek. 1998. *Language, Culture and Society: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology (Second Edition)*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Spender, Dale. 1984. "Defining Reality: A Powerful Tool." In Cheris Kramarae, Muriel Schultz and William M. O'Barr (eds) *Language and Power*, pgs. 194-205. London: Sage.
- Spitulnik, Debra. 2001. "The Social Circulation of Media Discourse and the Mediation of Communities." In Alessandro Duranti (ed) *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, pgs. 95-118. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Taylor, Charles. 1985. "Theories of Meaning." In *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*, pgs. 248-292.
- Tedlock, Dennis and Bruce Mannheim. 1995. "Introduction." In *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*, pgs. 1-32. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.