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California State University—Northridge
English 405
Language Variation & Change
Syllabus

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Course Description: This course serves as a general introduction to the theory behind language variation and language change. Theoretical aspects of first and second language acquisition will be presented as a foundation for relevant discussions in language change. Dialects, Colloquialisms, Vernaculars, Pidgins & Creoles, Slang, as well as diachronic perspectives on language change will be examined.

Course Objectives:

Students enrolled in this class will gain a certain amount of "Explicit" knowledge of language based on Theory, Linguistic Description and Analysis so that they may be better equipped to handle the broader linguistic phenomenon of language change. Basic elements of Grammar will be introduced as well as Phonological Transcription (IPA). Language Variation & Change has much in common with the basic principles behind first language acquisition, so an introduction to the acquisition theory is relevant to the class. Students will acquire the fundamentals behind Acquisition Theory. Knowledge obtained in the first sections of the class concerning acquisition will then be applied to language change.

Lecture Topics:

- General Linguistic Theory
- Nature of Language: Universals & Variation
- Studies in Phonology & Morphology
- Theories of First and Second Language Acquisition
- L1 Interferences in L2 learning and psychological factors in L2 language learning
- Language Maintenance
- Language Variation & Change
- Pidgins & Creoles
- Historical Language Change

(JG)

Assignments:

- Readings
- In-class Essays/ Final (one after each of the three lectures: bluebook) on a relevant lecture topic
- One Paper (2,500w) on approved topics related in some way to Language Change

or

- One Field-Work Project (Abstract 1000w) which will include Diary notation or Recording on Language Variation/Change: to be presented to the class during the final week.

Course Requirements:

Attend class meetings; read assigned material; participate in discussions; complete assignments and exams (above). Written work will be marked in terms of clarity, explicitness, and accuracy relevant to course topics.

Grading:

- 3 In-class Essays/Final (in conclusion of each lecture) (80% t)
- 1 Research Paper, or Project: (20%)
 - E.g., Spontaneous Speech samples of an L1/2 subject
 - Grammatical analyses (Non-IPA),
 - Phonological analyses (IPA)
 - Sociolinguistic observations
 - Language Change Analysis
- Attendance

5=A (outstanding), 4=A/B, 3=B/C, 2=C/D, 1=F (fail)

Required text:

- (i) Cook, Vivian (1997) *Inside Language* (St. Martin's Press/Cambridge)
- (ii) Galasso, Joseph (2004) *Working Paper: Lecture 3* (posted on my web-site).
- (iii) Handouts

Withdrawal Policy:

Withdrawals during the final three weeks of instruction are not permitted except in cases such as accident or serious illness. See the *Schedule of Classes* for withdrawal information prior to the final three weeks.

English 405
Lecture notes

Introduction: *Chapters 1-2* A Brief outline of language philosophy: Nativism (Chomsky) vs. Environmental Conditioning/Behaviourism (Skinner), Linguistic Perspectives, What is language? Tacit-Implicit knowledge vs. Focal-Explicit knowledge, Lexical vs. Functional Language.

Lecture I: Weeks 2-6

Chapters 2-5

Sounds: *Chapter 4*

- Universal Sounds: Babytalk (pp.150-165)
- Phonology and the English Sound System
 - IPA Transcription (p. 286)
 - Sound shift
 - Register (class)
 - Ablaut / Umlaut
 - Phonological processes
- L1 vs. L2 Phonological Interferences
- Category Perception / Change
(Handouts taken from Kuhl & Meltzoff: pp. 7-44)
- Morphology and Phonology: assimilation, allomorph
 - Functional Tense/Agreement/Case
 - Morphemes: Lexical Incorporation vs. INFlection

Words: Knowing a Language: *Chapters 2, 3, 5*

- Language Universals—Biological Bases of Language
 - Describing a Universal Language
 - Lexical vs. Functional Categories in Language
 - Implicit vs. Explicit Linguistic knowledge
 - Nature of Language
 - Language Specifics and Language Types
 - Pro-drop
 - SVO vs. SOV & Movement
- ==> Exam

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Lecture II: Weeks 7-11

Chapters 5,7,11

First Language Acquisition: Parameters behind language change

- Universal Grammar
- Principles and Parameters Theory: Nativism & Environmentalism
 - Review of Skinner vs. Chomsky
 - Lexical vs. Functional Categories Revisited
- Child First Language Acquisition
 - Syntactic development
- Theories of First Language Acquisition
 - Radford & Galasso (Handout 1998)
- Differences between First & Second Language Acquisition
- "When language goes wrong" (*Ch.9*)

==> Exam

Lecture III: Weeks 12-16+

Chapters 6, 8, 10 (handouts)

Language Variation & Change

- Language in the beginning
 - Tower of Babel (Pinker 1994, handout)
 - Language evolution & origin (Pinker/ Bloom)
- Intro to Language Borrowing & Change—Lexical items and writing system
 - politics of bi-dialectalism
 - Language Maintenance vs. Shift
 - Language attitudes
- Varieties of Languages (handouts)
 - slang, dialects, non-standard English
- Black Dialect
- Chicano Dialect
- Spanglish and Code-switching
- Formal language change
 - Romance languages
 - Old to Early Modern English (See 'Working Paper: Lecture 3')
- Pidgins & Creoles (Handout)

==> Exam