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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 synchronic & 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

Languages Examined:

- Current English (CE)
- African American English (AAE)
- Spanish, Italian, French, Japanese, Pidgin, Creole.
- Early Modern English (EME)
- Child Language (CL)

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Assignments:

- Readings
 - In-class Essays/(three 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.
 - Final exam (3rd Take-home test): analyzing aspects of Shakespearian grammar (a working paper will be provided).

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 Summary 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,

Required text:

- Galasso, Joseph (2009) *Minimum of English Grammar* (University Readers)
- Handouts

Optional reading:

- Bickerton, D. (1990) *Language & Species*. (Chicago Press).
- Romaine, S. (1994) *Language in Society*. (Oxford University Press).
- Pinker, S. (1994) *The Language Instinct*. (Morrow and Co.)

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.

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English 405 **Lecture**

Introduction: *Chapter 1* 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. The ‘Sally’ Experiment. (Chapter 3, §3.2).

Lecture I: What is a Language?

Sounds

Chapter 13

- Phonology (the American/English sound system)
- IPA (International Phonetic Transcription)
- Phonological Processing and Features—a mechanism for change
 - Rule-based sound system
 - Distinctive Features
 - Assimilation
 - Phonological Development

Words

Chapters 2, 3

- What is a ‘word’?
- Word Features—a mechanism for change
 - Semantic shift
- Lexical vs. Functional word categories
 - Derivational vs. Inflectional morphologies
 - Chunking and incorporation
 - Language types
- A note on processing in the brain

→ **Lecture 1: Exam**

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Lecture II: Parameters behind Language Variation: Synchronic Studies

Chapters 10, 10.2, 11, 13.3, 13.4

Parameters/Structure:

- Principles & Parameters Theory/Structure/Universal Grammar
 - Lexical vs. Functional recap
- Parameter setting (§10.2)
 - Phonological Parameters (§§10.2.2., 13.3/13.4)
 - Morphological Parameters (§10.2.3)
 - Syntactic Parameters (§10.2.5)
- Phrase Structure

Different Language Types (§10.2.3)

- Inflectional vs. Non-INFlectional Languages
- Pro-drop Languages
- Bare Verb Stem Languages
- Word Order in Languages
 - Comparing Language Types:

L1-Interferences:

- L1 Phonological Interference (§13.4)
- L1 Morpho-syntactic Interferences

Theories of Language Acquisition: *Chapter 11*

- Differences between L1 and L2
- The Critical Period Hypothesis
- Pidgin & Creole Languages (Romaine)

Language Evolution and Pathways to Language

- Proto-Language (Bickerton)
- Looking at some Language Disorders as a way to measure the spectrum of language change (Pinker)

→ **Lecture II: Exam**

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Lecture III: Historical Language Change: Diachronic Studies, “Non”-Standard Grammars, Shakespearian English

Chapters 12, 13

Areas of Language Change:

- Phonological
 - The Great Vowel Shift (§§13.1, 13.2.2)
 - Grimm’s Law
 - Umlat & Ablaut
- Morphology
 - Loss of Inflection (§12.4)

“Non-Standard” Grammars

- Ebonics
- Black Vernacular, African American English
- Spanglish / code-switching

Early Modern English (EME) Shakespearian English

- Parameter variations in EME
- Analyses

→ **Lecture III: Exam
(Take Home on EME)**