CAS LX 110: Say what? Accents, Dialects, and Society

**Language:**

Boston University Linguistics
College of Arts and Sciences

**CAS LX 110: Say what? Accents, Dialects, and Society**

**Time:** Tues/Thurs 12.30pm-2.00
**Location:** CAS 216
**Professor:** Neil Myler
**Email:** myler@bu.edu
**Office:** 621 Commonwealth Ave
**Office hours:** Tues 2pm-3.30, Weds 9am-10.30

Course website: Blackboard Learn

**Course objectives:**

When people from different regions of the US and from various parts of the English-speaking world meet for the first time, they are immediately struck by differences in the way they speak. For speakers of so-called “non-standard” dialects, this can give rise to insecurity and frustration, and dialect prejudice may lead such speakers to suppress aspects of their native variety (an experience familiar to many American college students). But is there any objective reason to consider non-standard dialects as inferior? What are the implications of dialect diversity for education, civil rights, and other aspects of public policy? How are dialects and their speakers represented in literature, film, humor, music, and other aspects of popular culture? How exactly does English vary across different places and social groups? Where do these accents and dialects come from in the first place? This course, which assumes no previous background in linguistics, investigates these questions from both a linguistic and a more broadly humanistic perspective.

**Prerequisites for the course:**

None. Students who have already taken CAS LX 250 or any higher-level linguistics course (or are doing so concurrently) are not eligible to take CAS LX 110.

**Students completing the course will:**

- Gain knowledge of how English varies across different regions of the US and around the world.
- Understand the implications of dialect variation for various aspects of society, including education.
- Learn how dialects and their speakers have been represented in (and have participated in) literature, film, music, stand-up comedy, and other forms of popular media.
• Learn how to describe the differences between accents and dialects in precise terms.
• Learn how to use the International Phonetic Alphabet to transcribe differences between accents of English.

Required Reading

There is no main textbook for this course. Instead, we will be reading a variety of book chapters and articles, scans of which will be made available on Blackboard learn. It is the responsibility of the students to consult the syllabus and keep up with the reading assigned for each class session.

Required Software and Equipment

We will be using the Top Hat (www.tophat.com) classroom response system in class. You will be able to submit answers to in-class questions using Apple or Android smartphones and tablets, laptops, or through text message.

You can visit the Top Hat Overview (https://success.tophat.com/s/article/Student-Top-Hat-Overview-and-Getting-Started-Guide) within the Top Hat Success Center which outlines how you will register for a Top Hat account, as well as providing a brief overview to get you up and running on the system.

An email invitation will be sent to you by email, but if don’t receive this email, you can register on the Top Hat website, but you will need the join code for our class.

Top Hat will require a paid subscription, and a full breakdown of all subscription options available can be found here: www.tophat.com/pricing.

Should you require assistance with Top Hat at any time, due to the fact that they require specific user information to troubleshoot these issues, please contact their Support Team directly by way of email (support@tophat.com), the in app support button, or by calling 1-888-663-5491.

Course Requirements and grading:

• Class participation: 10%
• 12 Assignments: 50%
• Final essay: 40%

Class participation will be assessed on the basis of your attendance record and your level of participation in class discussions/in-class exercises, including TopHat questions.
The Assignments will be a mixture of linguistic problem-solving (i.e., applying analytical techniques and skills learned in class to unfamiliar linguistic data), short-answer critical thinking questions, and short papers based on critical reading.

The Final Essay will be between 5 and 10 pages (single spaced), and may be on any of the following topics:

- A linguistic description of a particular dialect
- An essay on the history of English in the US
- An essay on the representation of dialect in (a piece of) literature or some other medium
- An essay in “applied dialectology”—i.e., a discussion of the importance of issues of dialect for a particular area of society or social policy (e.g., education, speech pathology, linguistic civil rights and their interaction with other civil rights issues; etc.)
- An op-ed-style essay aimed at debunking one or more popular myths about accents and dialects.

Students must settle on a title for their essay and meet with the instructor for approval of it by Thursday, Nov 10.

The final essay itself is due at noon on whatever day the final examination would have taken place if there had been one.

Course policies:

Copyright. All materials used in this course are copyrighted. This is obvious in the case of the readings, but it also holds of my lecture slides, exercises, and other materials. Reproducing class materials, or uploading them to websites, is a copyright infringement.

New assignments are posted to Blackboard on Thursday mornings, and are due on the following Thursday. Completed assignments are to be printed out and turned in at the beginning of Thursday class. Email submission is not permitted unless you are unable to attend class for some valid reason.

Late assignments are not accepted, except under relevant extenuating circumstances.

Please let me know of any unavoidable absences, whether for religious, personal, or health reasons, as soon as you become aware of them. If you know you will be observing one or more religious holidays this semester, please examine the syllabus to determine which class days you will need to miss, and let me know by email as soon as possible. I will work with you to help you catch up on missed work, in accordance with BU’s policy on religious absences: (http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/)

No make-up exams will be granted, unless compelling personal, religious, or medical reasons force you to miss an examination and you have my permission in advance. The
decision to grant or refuse a make-up exam is mine. A make-up exam will always be accommodated in the event of a religious absence.

**Procedures.** Class time will be used to reinforce, practice, and extend material found in the readings. As well as new material, classes will often involve group exercises designed to reinforce the more difficult concepts.


Extra credit exercises will be granted only at my discretion and, if granted at all, will be made available to the whole class in the form of additional “bonus” sections of assignments or exams.

**Academic Integrity.** All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the BU Academic Conduct Code, available at: [http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/](http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/)

Graduate students should refer to the GRS Academic Conduct Code, which can be found here: [http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/](http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/)

**Collaboration.** If you decide to form a study group to work together on assignments, your collaboration should not go beyond discussing ideas together. In other words, you must **write up your own assignment separately from the group, using only your own words** (except when quoting other work directly, in which case use citations as standard).

The following are all **banned forms of collaboration:**

- Having one or more members of the group produce a “group draft”, or “group essay plan”, which individual members of the group then customize.
- Writing up on separate computers while conferring with each other in real time (whether in person or via skype, chat services, or any other medium).
- Using another student’s complete assignment as a reference when completing your own.

Furthermore, **when assignments are problem-set-based rather than essay-based, I encourage you to try to work alone**, at least at first. Otherwise, it will be hard for you to tell how much you’ve really understood.
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Grading standards:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>78-79.99</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>90-92.99</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>73-77.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>88-89.99</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>70-72.99</td>
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<td>83-87.99</td>
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<td>60-69.99</td>
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<td>80-82.99</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
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Course Overview (subject to change-- any updates will be posted to Blackboard)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Deadlines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1, Tuesday, Sept. 6</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Course overview and logistics</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Accents, Dialects, and Attitudes</strong></td>
<td>Dunstan and Jaeger (2015)</td>
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<td><em>Dialects and influences on the Academic Experience of College Students</em></td>
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<td>Thursday, Sept. 8</td>
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<td><em>Prescriptivism vs Descriptivism</em></td>
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<td><strong>Types of language variation</strong></td>
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<td>Assignment 2 Due</td>
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<td><em>Introduction to key concepts in language description</em></td>
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<td>Thursday, Sept. 15</td>
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<td>Week 3, Tuesday, Sept. 20</td>
<td><strong>Lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic variation</strong></td>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Schilling-Estes (2016) Ch 3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Online Resources on dialect variation</strong></td>
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<td>Assignment 2 Due</td>
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<td>Thursday, Sept. 22</td>
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<td>Week 4, Tuesday, Sept. 27</td>
<td><strong>Transcribing and Describing Accents</strong></td>
<td>Fromkin et al. (2011) Ch 6</td>
<td>Assignment 3 Due</td>
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<td><em>Basic Articulatory Phonetics</em></td>
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<td><strong>Phonetic Transcription</strong></td>
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<td>Thursday, Sept. 29</td>
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| Week 5  | Tuesday, Oct. 4 | Where do accents and dialects come from?  
*Guest Lecture by Prof. Daniel Erker*  
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td>Tuesday, Oct. 11</td>
<td>NO CLASS—BU on a Monday Schedule</td>
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|         | Thursday, Oct. 13 | *Dialect Regions in the US*  
*Major isoglosses of the continental US*  
*Dialect regions continued* | Wolfram (2014) | Assignment 5 Due |
| **Week 7**  | Tuesday, Oct. 18 | *Dialects and Identity*  
*Gender variation* | |
|         | Thursday, Oct. 20 | *Sociolects and Ethnolects* | Spears (2014)  
Fought (2014) | Assignment 6 Due |
| **Week 8**  | Tuesday, Oct. 25 | *Dialects, Literature, and Humor*  
*Dialect-speakers as Comic Relief from Chaucer onwards* | Chaucer (1389)  
*The Reeve’s Tale* | |
|         | Thursday, Oct. 27 | *Dialects and social realism* | Dickens (1850)  
*David Copperfield*  
Ch 21 and 22  
Poussa (2000) | Assignment 7 Due |
| **Week 9**  | Tuesday, Nov. 1 | *Dialects, and Literature Humor cont.*  
Case study: dialects in Their Eyes Were Watching God | Hurston (1937/2000)  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God*  
Ch 1, 2, 19, 20  
King (2008) pp. 52-61; 112-114  
Green (2002) Ch 6 | |
|         | Thursday, Nov. 3 | *Accents, Dialects, and Music*  
*African American English and Hip-Hop* | Alim et al. (2009)  
Ch 1 | Assignment 8 Due |
<p>| <strong>Week 10</strong>  | Tuesday, Nov. 8 | <em>Non-standard accents in British rock from the Beatles to Britpop</em> | Trudgill (1983) | |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Notes</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, Nov. 10</td>
<td><strong>Accents, Dialects, Film, Video Games, and TV</strong></td>
<td>Green (2002) Ch 7</td>
<td>Assignment 9 Due&lt;br&gt;Students must meet with me to settle on an essay title by the end of this week.</td>
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<td>Case studies:&lt;br&gt;Shrek&lt;br&gt;The Princess and the Frog</td>
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<td><strong>Week 11</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dialects in comedy</strong></td>
<td>Rahman (2015)</td>
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<td>Tuesday, Nov. 15</td>
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<td><strong>Week 12</strong></td>
<td><strong>English Dialects across the World</strong>&lt;br&gt;British English&lt;br&gt;NZ English&lt;br&gt;Australian English</td>
<td>Kiesling (2009); Hughes et al. (2012) Ch 1 and 4</td>
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<td>Tuesday, Nov. 22</td>
<td><strong>Guest Lecture by Prof. Charles Chang</strong>&lt;br&gt;Foreign Accents and English</td>
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<td>Thursday, Nov. 24</td>
<td><strong>No Class—Thanksgiving Break</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Week 13</strong></td>
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<td>Tuesday, Nov. 29</td>
<td><strong>Singlish</strong>&lt;br&gt;Indian English</td>
<td>Bautista and Gonzalez (2009); Gargesh (2009);</td>
<td>Assignment 11 Due</td>
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<td>Thursday, Dec. 1</td>
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<td><strong>Week 14</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grammatical Diversity</strong>&lt;br&gt;“They don’t think it be like it is, but it do”: The verb system of AAVE vs. Other Dialects</td>
<td>Green (2002) Ch 2</td>
<td>Assignment 12 Due</td>
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<td>Tuesday, Dec. 6</td>
<td><strong>Summing Up</strong>&lt;br&gt;Retrospective look at the course&lt;br&gt;Discussion of Final Essays in Progress</td>
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<td>Thursday, Dec. 8</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Final Essay Due</td>
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Course Bibliography


Dickens, Charles. 1850. David Copperfield.


