

**Boston University Linguistics Program  
College of Arts and Sciences**

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

**Time:** Tues/Thurs 9.30-10.45

**Professor:** Neil Myler

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**Course website:** Blackboard Learn

**Course Description:**

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:**

1. Learn how to describe the differences between accents and dialects in precise terms, using relevant technical concepts from the subfields of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

2. Learn to use the International Phonetic Alphabet to transcribe differences between accents of English.
3. Gain knowledge of how English varies across different regions of the US and around the world.
4. Analyze how ideologies about language use have affected their beliefs about others as well as others' beliefs about them. In doing so, they will come to recognize the ways in which ideologies about language use intersect with societal issues of racism, sexism, and classism in the various communities they participate in.
5. Learn how dialects and their speakers have been represented in (and have participated in producing) literature, film, music, stand-up comedy, and other forms of popular media, and reflect on how such representations might have influenced their own beliefs and behaviors.
6. Understand the implications of dialect variation for various aspects of social policy, including education and the law.
7. Be able to distinguish sound research on accents and dialects from popular myths and prejudices.
8. Learn how to carry out their own research project, going through the stages of identifying a topic, formulating a research question, gathering together reliable existing sources and/or their own linguistic data, and writing up a paper.

### **Hub Units and Divisional Studies Requirements**

This course counts for the following Hub Units:

- Social Inquiry I
- The Individual in Community
- Intellectual Toolkit: Research and Information Literacy

See here for descriptions of the learning outcomes associated with these Hub Units:

<https://www.bu.edu/hub/what-is-the-hub/>

Note that the course learning goals listed above are essentially discipline-specific instantiations of the learning outcomes associated with these Hub Units, as follows:

<i>Hub Unit...</i>	<i>Corresponds to course learning goals...</i>
Social Inquiry 1	1-3
The Individual in Community	4-6
Intellectual Toolkit: Research and Information Literacy	7-8

For students who matriculated before Fall 2018, or who transferred to BU from elsewhere before Fall 2020, this course satisfies the Divisional Studies Humanities requirement.

### **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**

You will require access to equipment that can record sound in order to record a sociolinguistic interview for Assignment 5. A laptop or cell phone will do.

Prof. Myler will occasionally use directpoll.com during lecture period to ensure comprehension and engagement, sample student opinion, and to ask questions designed to promote discussion. In classes where a poll will be used, the link will be emailed out before the class, and you can join the poll from your laptop or smartphone.

### **Sections**

In addition to attending class sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays, every student must register for Friday section, which will be run by one of the two Teaching Fellows.

Section	Teaching Fellow	Time	Room	Status
S1	Dionne	9.05-9.55	CAS 228	1 space left
S2	Vidal Covas	11.15-12.05	PSY B 51	Full
S3	Dionne	12.20-1.10	SOC B 61	2 spaces left
S4	Vidal Covas	1.25-2.15	CAS B 27	Full
S5	Dionne	2.30-3.20	CAS 227	6 spaces left
S6	Vidal Covas	3.35-4.24	CAS 227	7 spaces left

### **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 in your Friday sections.

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, short papers based on critical reading, and applying concepts from class to linguistic data that you have gathered yourself in the sociolinguistic interview you'll record for assignment 5.

The Final Essay will be **between 1500 and 3000 words long** (excluding the bibliography/bibliographical footnotes), and may be on any of the following topics (or another topic if you think of something else that might be appropriate, and get Prof. Myler's approval for it):

- A paper involving further analysis of the sociolinguistic interview you recorded for assignment 5.
- A linguistic description of a particular dialect, based on a review of existing research literature (potentially in combination with insights from your interview, if relevant.)
- An essay on the history of English in the US (or elsewhere in the world)
- 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 submit a final project proposal form by email, by 11.59pm on **the Friday, November 9<sup>th</sup> (the Friday of Week 10)**. A template for the form can be found on Blackboard.

The final essay itself is due **before midnight on Tuesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>** (i.e., by the end of the last day of class). The final submission should be in pdf form, and should include a final word-count.

### **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 our 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 Friday mornings, and are due in your section on the following Friday. Completed assignments are to be printed out and turned in to your Teaching Fellow at the beginning of your Friday section. Email submission is not permitted unless you are unable to attend section for some valid reason. Some assignments will also require submission via Blackboard for plagiarism checking—see the instructions on individual assignments for when you'll need to do this.

By default, late assignments are not accepted. If a sudden illness, bereavement, or other valid extenuating circumstance causes you to be unable to complete an assignment in a timely manner, let your Teaching Fellow know as soon as possible. Extensions are granted at the discretion of the teaching personnel only.

Please let us 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 the professor and your TF know by email as soon as possible. We 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/>)

Disability Accommodations. We are committed to making this course accessible to all. Please let Professor Myler and your TF know of any documented disabilities for which you require accommodations, so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

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. The Friday section will involve further such exercises, as well as discussion of the assignments.

Classroom etiquette. Cell phones, laptops, and similar devices should be used only for responding to directpoll.com questions or taking notes. When it comes to taking notes, however, be aware that there's good evidence that, for many people, taking notes by hand is more beneficial for learning than typing:  
<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>

Extra credit exercises will be granted only at Prof. Myler's discretion and, if granted at all, will be made available to the whole class in the form of additional "bonus" sections of assignments.

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/>

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, we 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.

**Grading standards:**

93-100	A	78-79.99	C+
90-92.99	A-	73-77.99	C
88-89.99	B+	70-72.99	C-
83-87.99	B	60-69.99	D
80-82.99	B-	<60	F

**Course Overview (subject to change—any updates will be posted to Blackboard)**

Week Dates	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
<b>Week 1</b> Tuesday, Sept. 4	<b>Introduction</b> <i>Course overview and logistics</i>		
Thursday, Sept. 6	<b>Accents, Dialects, and Attitudes</b> <i>Dialects and influences on the Academic Experience of College Students</i>	Dunstan and Jaeger (2015)	
<b>Week 2</b> Tuesday, Sept. 11	<i>Dialect discrimination</i> <i>Prescriptivism vs Descriptivism</i>	Baugh (2015); Preston (1998); Rickford and King (2016)	
Thursday, Sept. 13	<b>Grammatical Diversity</b> <i>“They don’t think it be like it is, but it do”</i> : <i>The verb system of AAVE vs. Other Dialects</i>	Green (2002) Ch 2	Assignment 1 Due in section Friday, Sept. 14
<b>Week 3</b> Tuesday, Sept. 18	<i>Grammatical Diversity</i> <i>Continued</i>		
Thursday, Sept. 20	<b>Types of language variation</b> <i>Lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 3	Assignment 2 Due in section Friday, Sept. 21

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	<i>variation</i> <i>Online Resources on dialect variation</i>		
<b>Week 4</b> Tuesday, Sept. 25	<b>Transcribing and Describing Accents</b> <i>Basic Articulatory Phonetics and Phonetic Transcription: Consonants</i>	Fromkin et al. (2011) Ch 6	
Thursday, Sept. 27	<i>Basic Articulatory Phonetics and Phonetic Transcription: Vowels</i>		Assignment 3 Due in section Friday, Sept. 28
<b>Week 5</b> Tuesday, Oct. 2	<b>Doing Sociolinguistics</b>	Meyerhoff, Schlee, and Mackenzie (2015) Ch 5, Ch 10, and Ch 11	
Thursday, Oct. 4	<b>Where do accents and dialects come from?</b> <i>How language changes</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 2	Assignment 4 Due in section Friday, Oct. 5
<b>Week 6</b> Tuesday, Oct. 9	<b>NO CLASS—BU on a Monday Schedule</b>		
Thursday, Oct. 11	<b>Dialect Regions in the US</b> <i>Major isoglosses of the continental US</i> <i>Dialect regions</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 5	Assignment 5 Due in section, Friday, Oct. 12 (Sociolinguistic Interview Recording to be uploaded to Blackboard)
<b>Week 7</b> Tuesday, Oct. 16	<b>English Dialects across the World</b> <i>British English</i>	Hughes et al. (2012) Ch 1 and 4	
Thursday, Oct. 18	<i>NZ English</i> <i>Australian English</i>	Kiesling (2009);	Assignment 6 Due in section Friday, Oct. 19
<b>Week 8</b> Tuesday, Oct. 23	<i>Singlish</i> <i>Indian English</i>	Bautista and Gonzalez (2009); Gargesh (2009); Alsagoff and Ho (1998)	

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Thursday, Oct. 25	<i>English in Africa; Caribbean English</i>	TBD	Assignment 7 Due in section Friday, Oct. 26
<b>Week 9</b> Tuesday, Oct. 30	<b>Dialects and Identity I</b> <i>Gender-based variation</i>	Schilling (2011)	
Thursday, Nov. 1	<b>No Class—Professor Myler Away</b>		<b>Assignment 8 Due in Section as normal, Friday Nov. 2nd</b>
<b>Week 10</b> Tuesday, Nov. 6	<b>Dialects and Identity II</b> <i>Sociolects and Ethnolects</i>	Spears (2014); Fought (2014)	
Thursday, Nov. 8	<b>Dialects, Literature, and Humor</b> <i>Dialect-speakers as Comic Relief from Chaucer onwards</i> <i>Dialects and social realism</i>	Chaucer (1389) <i>The Reeve’s Tale</i> [Content note: this reading depicts sexual assault]; Dickens (1850) <i>David Copperfield</i> Ch 21 and 22; Poussa (2000)	Assignment 9 Due in section Friday, Nov. 9  Students must submit their final project proposal form to Professor Myler by email (cc-ing their TF) by the end of Friday this week.
<b>Week 11</b> Tuesday, Nov. 13	<b>Dialects, Literature, and Humor cont.</b> Case study: dialects in <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	Hurston (1937/2000) <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> Ch 1, 2, 19, 20; King (2008) pp.52-61; 112-114; Green (2002) Ch 6	
Thursday, Nov. 15	<b>Accents, Dialects, and Music</b> <i>African American English and Hip-Hop</i> <i>Non-standard accents in British rock from the Beatles to Britpop</i>	Abreu (2015); Duncan (2016); Trudgill (1983); Eberhardt and Freeman (2015)	Assignment 10 Due in section Friday, Nov. 16
<b>Week 12</b> Tuesday, Nov. 20	<b>Accents, Dialects, Film, and TV</b> Case studies:	Green (2002) Ch 7 Rahman (2015)	



	<i>Shrek</i> <i>The Princess and the Frog</i> <i>Dialects in comedy</i>		
Thursday, Nov. 22	<b>No Class—Thanksgiving Break</b>		No assignment due, no Friday section this week
<b>Week 13</b> Tuesday, Nov. 27	<b>Applied Dialectology</b> <i>Dialects and Education</i> <i>Dialects and Clinical Linguistics</i> <i>The “Ebonics” Controversy</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 11; Alim et al. (2009) Ch 11; Ronkin & Karn 1999	
Thursday, Nov. 29	<i>Applied dialectology continued</i>		Assignment 11 Due in section Friday, Nov. 30
<b>Week 14</b> Tuesday, Dec. 4	<b>Buffer</b>		
Thursday, Dec. 6	<i>Discussion of Final Essays in Progress</i>		Assignment 12 Due in Section Friday, Dec. 7
<b>Week 15</b> Tuesday, Dec. 11	<b>Summing Up</b> <i>Retrospective look at the course;</i> <i>Last-minute final project trouble-shooting</i>		Final Essay Due before midnight, by email to Professor Myler, in pdf form.

**Course Bibliography**

Abreu, Manuel Arturo. 2015. Online Imagined Black English. *Arachne Issue 1*.

Alim, H. Samy, Awad Ibrahim, & Alastair Pennycook. (eds.) 2009. *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*. New York: Routledge.

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Bautista, Maria Lourdes S. & Andrew B. Gonzalez. 2009. Southeast Asian Englishes. In Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru and Cecil L. Nelson (eds.) *The Handbook of World Englishes*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. Pp. 130-144.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. 1389. *The Reeve's Tale*. In *The Canterbury Tales*.

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Eberhardt, Maeve, and Kara Freeman. 2015. "First things first I'm the realest": Linguistic Appropriation, White Privilege, and the Hip Hop Persona of Iggy Azalea. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 19.3:303-27.

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- Schilling, Natalie. 2011. Language, Gender, and Sexuality. In Rajend Mesthrie and Walt Wolfram (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 218-237.
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- Wolfram, Walt & Natalie Schilling. 2016. *American English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Oxford: Blackwell.