

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

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

Time: Tues/Thurs 12.30-1.45pm

Professor: Neil Myler

Office: 621 Commonwealth Ave
Room B08

Location: CAS B20

Email: myler@bu.edu

Office hours: T 2-3.30pm; W 4.30-6pm
or by appointment

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:

- 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

For this course, we will be running a **free trial** of Turning Technologies response software. This software can be run from a computer or cell phone, or using a clicker if you already own one from an earlier course. Each student will receive a free a subscription code by email from me on the first day. We will use this software frequently for exercises in class.

Once you have your code, please follow these instructions (supplied by Turning Technologies) to activate your account. We will be trying the technology out during the second class meeting, so try to get your account activated as soon as possible. If a problem arises, contact Turning Technologies as fast as possible at the email address or phone number below.

To Create an Account and Activate License:

1. Log into Blackboard and follow the Turning Account link.
2. Click **Create Account**.
3. Enter your email address and click **Next**. It is strongly recommended that you use your school email address.
4. Check your email and click the link to verify your Turning Account.
5. After verifying your email, enter all required fields as noted by the asterisks on the **Profile** page.

If you have a clicker, enter your Device ID in the **Device ID** field. The Device ID is located on the **BACK** of your clicker below the barcode.

Enter your license code in the **License** field and click Validate.

6. Click **Create Account**.

NOTE: If you do not have access to your Turning Account license code during account creation, you can redeem a license at any time by selecting **Licenses** from the left menu.

NOTE: If you do not have access to your clicker during account creation, you add your clicker at any time by selecting **Devices** from the left menu.

Any questions can be directed to our Technical Support Team at support@turningtechnologies.com or [866.746.3015](tel:866.746.3015). Thank you!

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 Turning 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 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 my approval for it):

- A linguistic description of a particular dialect
- 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 **Friday, Nov 10 (the Friday of Week 10)**. A template for the form can be found on Blackboard

The final essay itself is due at **noon** on **Saturday, 12/17**. 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 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/>)

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.

Classroom etiquette. Cell phones, laptops, and similar devices should be used only for responding to Turning questions or taking notes. When it comes to taking notes, however, be aware that there's good evidence that 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 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/>

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.

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
Week 1 Tuesday, Sept. 5	Introduction <i>Course overview and logistics</i>		
Thursday, Sept. 7	Accents, Dialects, and Attitudes <i>Dialects and influences on the Academic Experience of College Students</i>	Dunstan and Jaeger (2015)	
Week 2 Tuesday, Sept. 12	<i>Dialect discrimination</i> <i>Prescriptivism vs Descriptivism</i>	Baugh (2015); Preston (1998); Rickford and King (2016)	
Thursday, Sept. 14	Types of language variation <i>Introduction to key concepts in language description</i>		Assignment 1 Due
Week 3 Tuesday, Sept. 19	<i>Key concepts in language description continued</i>		
Thursday, Sept. 22	<i>Lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic variation</i> <i>Online Resources on dialect variation</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 3	Assignment 2 Due
Week 4 Tuesday, Sept. 26	Transcribing and Describing Accents <i>Basic Articulatory Phonetics and Phonetic Transcription: Consonants</i>	Fromkin et al. (2011) Ch 6	

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Thursday, Sept. 28	<i>Basic Articulatory Phonetics and Phonetic Transcription: Vowels</i>		Assignment 3 Due
Week 5 Tuesday, Oct. 3	Where do accents and dialects come from? <i>How language changes</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 2	
Thursday, Oct. 5	<i>History of English in the United States</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 4	Assignment 4 Due
Week 6 Tuesday, Oct. 10	NO CLASS—BU on a Monday Schedule		
Thursday, Oct. 12	Dialect Regions in the US <i>Major isoglosses of the continental US</i> <i>Dialect regions</i>	Wolfram & Schilling (2016) Ch 5	Assignment 5 Due
Week 7 Tuesday, Oct. 17	Dialects and Identity <i>Gender variation</i>	McConnell-Ginet (2014)	
Thursday, Oct. 19	<i>Sociolects and Ethnolects</i>	Spears (2014); Fought (2014)	Assignment 6 Due
Week 8 Tuesday, Oct. 24	<i>Sociolects and ethnolects continued</i>		
Thursday, Oct. 26	Dialects, Literature, and Humor <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 7 Due
Week 9 Tuesday, Oct. 31	Dialects, and Literature Humor cont. 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	

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Thursday, Nov. 2	Accents, Dialects, and Music <i>African American English and Hip-Hop</i> <i>Non-standard accents in British rock from the Beatles to Britpop</i>	Alim et al. (2009) Ch 1; Trudgill (1983); Eberhardt and Freeman (2015)	Assignment 8 Due
Week 10 Tuesday, Nov. 7	Accents, Dialects, Film, Video Games, and TV Case studies: <i>Shrek</i> <i>The Princess and the Frog</i>	Green (2002) Ch 7	
Thursday, Nov. 9	<i>Dialects in comedy</i>	Rahman (2015)	Assignment 9 Due Students must submit their final project proposal form by the end of Friday this week.
Week 11 Tuesday, Nov. 14	Applied Dialectology <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	
Thursday, Nov. 16	<i>Applied dialectology continued</i>		Assignment 10 Due
Week 12 Tuesday, Nov. 21	English Dialects across the World <i>British English</i>	Hughes et al. (2012) Ch 1 and 4	
Thursday, Nov. 23	No Class—Thanksgiving Break		
Week 13 Tuesday, Nov. 28	<i>NZ English</i> <i>Australian English</i>	Kiesling (2009);	
Thursday, Nov. 30	<i>Singlish</i> <i>Indian English</i>	Bautista and Gonzalez (2009); Gargesh (2009); TBA from Foley et al. (1998)	Assignment 11 Due
Week 14 Tuesday, Dec. 5	Grammatical Diversity <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	
Thursday, Dec. 7	<i>Grammatical Diversity Continued</i>		Assignment 12 Due
Week 15 Tuesday, Dec. 12	Summing Up <i>Retrospective look at the course</i> <i>Discussion of Final Essays in Progress</i>		

Saturday, Dec. 17 At Noon	Final Essay Due		
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Course Bibliography

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