CAS LX 342/ GRS LX 642: Language, Race, and Gender

Instructor: Daniel Erker  
Days: Tuesdays and Thursdays

Office: 718 Commonwealth Ave., 501A  
Time & Location: 9:30-10:45, CAS 116

Contact: danerker@bu.edu  
Credits: 4 units

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11a-12p, Wednesday 2:15-3:15, by appt.

Additional graduate student meeting:
- SED graduate students welcome, but not required to attend.

Course Description
At first glance, it may not be apparent that language plays a central role in establishing our identities. But, if we stop to give this idea the attention it deserves, and if we examine it through the proper lens, we are soon overwhelmed by the ways in which we create and sustain our personalities and negotiate our place in the world through language. In this course, we will examine these facts from the perspective of sociolinguistic theory, with a special focus on how the social categories of race and gender can be seen to shape, predict, interact with, and explain patterns of linguistic behavior. We will examine differences between boys and girls and men and women in conversational practice, identifying patterns in such behaviors as turn-taking, complimenting, story-telling, gossip, swearing, and boasting. We will also rely on the notions of (c)overt prestige, indexicality, and performativity to assess phonological, (morpho-)syntactic, and lexical variation in a host of speech communities and communicative contexts. Within this framework, we will also assess and in some cases challenge traditional conceptions of sex, gender, race, and ethnicity on linguistic grounds, asking what it takes and means to be considered be an ‘authentic’ speaker of a particular code or linguistic variety.

This course will allow you to explore the following Hub areas: Social Inquiry I and Intellectual Toolkit (Teamwork/Collaboration).

Learning Objectives
1. Students will engage with sociolinguistic theories and methods for describing and explaining patterns of socially conditioned linguistic variation, especially as they relate to the identity dimensions of sex/gender and race/ethnicity. Special emphasis will be placed on the application of quantitative methods for assessing the social forces and structures that give rise to patterns of sociolinguistic variation.

2. Students will be able to identify and describe points of divergence and convergence between the fields of linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and the sociology of language.

3. Students will critically examine current theoretical and methodological trends in research on various dimensions of human identity, focusing on gender and ethnicity. They will use their knowledge of these trends to investigate their own worldviews and beliefs, as well as those of other individuals and societies.

4. Students will demonstrate an understanding of foundational concepts in contemporary sociolinguistic inquiry, especially those that illuminate the workings of social groups, institutions, networks, and the
role of the individual in them, e.g., speech community, social network theory, accommodation theory, performativity, indexicality, and community of practice.

5. Students will investigate linguistic prestige, stigmatization, and prejudice, with an emphasis on the ethical implications of language differences associated with race and gender.

6. Students will learn to identify, obtain, engage, and analyze publicly available and discipline-specific information sources to address research questions and formulate research projects.

7. Students will collaboratively participate in the practice of linguistic research by designing and carrying out a sociolinguistic research project. This will include working as a team to (a) generate research questions, (b) formulate hypotheses, (c) collect data relevant for hypothesis testing, and (d) analyze, interpret, and communicate results. Certain roles within the team will rotate, in order to ensure that students have a diverse range of experiences within the team.

Learning objectives 1-4 link the course with the Hub Social Inquiry I outcome of identifying and applying major concepts in the social sciences to explain individual and collective human behavior, e.g., the workings of social groups, institutions, networks, and the role of the individual in them. The application of such concepts is at the very heart of the study of language in its social context, the central theme of this course.

Objectives 5-7 link the course with the Teamwork/Collaboration component of the Hub’s Intellectual Toolkit: (1) As a result of explicit training in teamwork and sustained experiences of collaborating with others, students will be able to identify the characteristics of a well-functioning team, and (2) Students will demonstrate an ability to use the tools and strategies of working successfully with a diverse group, such as assigning roles and responsibilities, giving and receiving feedback, and engaging in meaningful group reflection that inspires collective ownership of results.

The teamwork component of the course will be introduced early, no later than the end of Week 2, in anticipation of the distribution of the group-project guidelines in Week 4. Approximately bi-weekly in-class discussion of teamwork dynamics will be complemented by readings and materials on teamwork distributed via the course website. In Week 10, detailed guidelines for a written reflection on the teamwork experience will be distributed. Each student will submit their individual reflection independently of the group’s joint research project presentation (described below). Teamwork materials will include/be drawn from the following resources (among others):

1. MIT’s Teaching + Learning Lab (http://tll.mit.edu/help/teaching-teamwork)

2. UC Berkeley’s Center for Teaching and Learning (https://teaching.berkeley.edu/news/building-teamwork-process-skills-students)


These resources provide an explicit framework for teamwork that is lacking in many educational contexts, which is particularly problematic in the study of language in its social context. Actual research on this topic routinely depends on the productive interaction of teams whose individual members are responsible not only for carrying out specific tasks, but also for synthesizing and communicating the results of their work to other team members. Our approach to teamwork in the course will focus on engaging students in activities, collaboration, and reflection that closely approximate the experiences of members of research teams carrying out large-scale sociolinguistic inquiry.
Instructional Format and Learning Environment
The course will consist of a mix of interactive lectures, in-class exercises (both individual and group-based), and out-of-class activities. The course aims to create an active learning environment. This means that over the course of the semester you will be expected to solve problems collaboratively, practice self-assessment, and participate in a project-based learning experience.

Books and Other Course Materials
There are no required books for this course. I will provide all readings through the course website.

Courseware
The course website will be hosted on Blackboard Learn.

Assignments and Grading Criteria
• Biweekly quizzes (45%, five total). Quizzes will be administered at the end of class on alternating Thursdays, starting in Week 4. They will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, will consist of short-answer type questions, and will cover key concepts and terms introduced and discussed in the previous two weeks.

• Collaborative Research project (55% total, see weighting of individual components below): A fully detailed description of the project will be distributed in week 4 of the course. The following is an overview.

In teams of 7–8, students will collaboratively design and carry out an empirically-driven sociolinguistic research project over the course of the semester. The vast majority of empirical research on language in its social context depends on the work of teams of researchers. The division and distribution of tasks makes it possible to more deeply engage the research literature, formulate questions and hypotheses, collect and process meaningful amounts of data, and interpret and communicate results. It also improves overall research quality by providing regular opportunities for revision and refinement through group communication, constructive feedback, and group-reflection.

Teams will be created on the basis of individual member’s respective academic interests and backgrounds. Under the instructor’s guidance, teams will collectively formulate research questions and hypotheses and assign individual roles and responsibilities. Each team will collect data in relation to a classic sociolinguistic variable in American English of their choosing (e.g., post-vocalic r-lessness, be-like constructions, the low-back vowel merger, ing-reduction, creaky voice, complimenting, /r-d/ deletion, copula deletion) either by entering a target local community or via online data collection methods, and collaboratively analyze and interpret results. Each team member will be responsible for collecting speech data and submitting it to the team’s collective data set.

Each team will share the results of their project via a 25 minute in-class presentation (to be scheduled for some time in the last two weeks of the semester). The presentation will be collaboratively created by the research team, and it will consist of the following sections: (1) topic and overview of the project, (2) research question(s), (3) review of the research literature, (4) hypothesis and predictions, (5) data and methodology, (6) findings, (7) conclusions and implications, and (8) references. The presentation can either be delivered collectively or by a pair of individuals elected by the research team.

Finally, each individual team member will also submit a written reflection on both their individual work as well as their teamwork experience, including an assessment of each individual team member’s performance. The reflection should include an honest accounting of the strengths and weaknesses of the team and its members as well as one’s own individual performance. A detailed outline of the components of the teamwork reflection will be distributed in Week 10.
To summarize, the components of the research project, along with their respective grading allocations, are as follows.

Each individual student will submit:
- (20%) An audio file, an annotated Praat textgrid, and a coded data frame
- (10%) A written reflection on individual and teamwork experiences
- (10%, except for grads, see below) A summary and assessment of each group presentation

Each group will give:
- (10%) A 25-minute presentation in the last weeks of the course (all members will receive the same presentation grade)

Additional components of course grade/requirements:
- *Peer-assessment of team members*: 5% of each student’s overall grade (note that the preceding percentages amount only to 95%) will be calculated on the basis of evaluation by their research team members. This will be done in the context of the written reflection on teamwork. Peer-assessment instructions will be provided in the description of the Reflection component in Week 10.

- *Quantitative analysis*: Graduate students will be responsible for coordinating the data collection activities of their respective research teams as well carrying out the quantitative analysis of the data. Their summaries of presentations will constitute 5% of their course grade, and my assessment of how they conducted their analyses will constitute another 5%.

Grading Scale
The course will not be graded on a curve. This means that grades are determined according to a standard set, rather than via comparison of students against each other. Therefore, it is possible for everyone in the course to receive an ‘A’, as well as for everyone to receive an ‘F’. The correspondence of numerical grades to letter grades is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical Grade</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥ 93.00</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.00–92.99</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88.00–89.99</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.00–87.99</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.00–82.99</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 60.00</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resources and Support
- Please feel free to visit me during my **office hours**; I would be delighted to chat with you informally about course content and any questions or comments you may have. If you cannot make my regularly scheduled office hours, please feel free to contact me to make an appointment.
- If you are experiencing difficulties in keeping up with the academic demands of this course, please do communicate that to me. Also consider contacting your **academic advisor** (or CAS’s Office of Academic Advising: 100 Bay State Rd., Room 401, casadv@bu.edu, 617-353-2400) and/or make use of the **peer tutoring** resources at the Educational Resource Center (http://www.bu.edu/erc/peer-tutoring/).
- If you require course material in an alternative format or need special accommodations due to a **disability**, please contact me and the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible (http://www.bu.edu/disability/).
Class and University Policies

- Students are expected to come to class prepared and to engage with their classmates respectfully.
- There is no official attendance policy for the course. However, given the active learning approach adopted, students will get the most out of the course by attending regularly.
- All assignments will be submitted via Blackboard. Deadlines (for assignments, quizzes) are not flexible; however, if extenuating circumstances (e.g., religious obligation) make it impossible to meet a deadline or take a quiz on the regularly scheduled date, please talk with me to discuss alternative arrangements. In the case of a known conflict such as a religious holiday, please provide me with written notice of the conflict in advance.
- You are responsible for understanding and complying with the BU Academic Conduct Codes: https://www.bu.edu/cas/current-students/undergraduate/academic-conduct-code-2/ https://www.bu.edu/cas/files/2017/02/GRS-Academic-Conduct-Code-Final.pdf

It is assumed, unless you indicate otherwise, that your individual work in this course is your own. Work found to be the product of academic dishonesty can receive no credit, and such misconduct will be reported to the university.

[class schedule next page]
## Course Schedule (subject to adjustment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Readings for week (in order)</th>
<th>Main Topics &amp; Assignments (Due Dates)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | 1-22   | AIM TO COMPLETE WEEK’S READING BY TUES CLASS  
Hume 1739  
Bucholtz & Hall 2010 | Course Overview – Syllabus, Introductions  
Begin Unit 1 – *Locating Identity in Language and Life*  
Course survey (please complete by 1-29) |
|      | 1-24   |                             |                                      |
| 2    | 1-29   | Schilling 2013 (excerpt)  
Teamwork: MIT site  
Chevrot 2018 | Unit 1  
Hume’s bundle of perceptions, Bucholtz and Hall’s Five principles, Schilling’s cautions, See-Hear-Feel, the Illusory Self, Teamwork Basics, Course survey results |
|      | 1-31   |                             |                                      |
| 3    | 2-5    | Chomsky 1965(excerpt)  
Fischer 1958 | Begin Unit 2 – *A Serious Discipline*  
Overview of the study of language in its social context, Place of sociocultural Ix within linguistic theory, *-ing* reduction, First look at data frames and quantitative analysis |
|      | 2-7    |                             |                                      |
| 4    | 2-12   | Keisling 2004  
Teamwork: Carnegie Mellon Site  
QUIZ #1 | Unit 2- *Dude*, An Introduction to ‘3rd-Wave’ concepts, Comparing past and present research in sociocultural Ix  
DE Distribute Research Project Guidelines  
QUIZ #1 |
|      | 2-14   |                             |                                      |
|      | 2-19   | No Class - BU ON MONDAY SCHEDULE |                                      |
| 5    | 2-21   | Labov 1966  
Queen 2013  
Zimman 2013 | Unit 2 – Wrap up  
Begin Unit 3 – *Linguistic Variation – Sex, Gender, & Class*  
The NYC department store study |
|      | 2-26   | Labov 1990  
Tottie 2014  
Teamwork: Simonson 2013  
QUIZ #2 | Unit 3 – Overview of variation-sex/gender/class research, transgendered voices, Labov’s Principles, *Praat* demo (Textgrids for sociolx)  
*Research team working day #1*: Selecting your variable, generating your research questions, engaging the research literature |
|      | 2-28   |                             |                                      |
| 7    | 3-5    | Bucholtz 1999  
Eckert 2008 | Unit 3 – Nerd girls, *Community of Practice*, DE in-class conference presentation demonstration  
*Research team working day #2*: Identifying your data sources, assigning speakers, operationalizing linguistic and social factors. *(PE away)* |
|      | 3-7    |                             |                                      |
|      |       |                             |                                      |

**BU SPRING BREAK 3-9 to 3-17**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3-19</td>
<td>Fought 2013</td>
<td>Wrap up Unit 3 - filled pauses, the <em>Indexical Field</em>, data frame organization Research Team in-class status reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>QUIZ #3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3-26</td>
<td>Baugh 1979</td>
<td>Begin Unit 4 – <em>Linguistic Variation – Race &amp; Ethnicity</em> AAVE structural features and overview, language-crossing, extracting data from <em>Praat</em> Research team working day #3: Data collection and coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-28</td>
<td>Cutler 1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4-2</td>
<td>Bucholtz 1999</td>
<td>Unit 4 – The intersection of race and masculinity, unmarked social categories DE Distribute Teamwork Reflection Guidelines Individual dataframe submission deadline 4-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-4</td>
<td>QUIZ #4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>Bailey 2000</td>
<td>Guest Linguist: Professor Sabriya Fisher, Wellesley College – vocalic variation among African Americans in Philadelphia Research Team working day #4: Discussing results, Presentation Prep 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>4-16</td>
<td>Newman Wu 2011</td>
<td>Unit 4 – Phenotypes-ethnolinguistic terms-Dominicans, local construction of race and ethnicity Research Team working day #5: Presentation Prep 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-18</td>
<td>QUIZ #5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>4-23</td>
<td>No additional reading</td>
<td>Unit 4 – Acoustic correlates of ‘Sounding’ Asian American PRESENTATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4-30</td>
<td>No additional reading</td>
<td>PRESENTATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tuesday May 7: Reflections and Presentation summaries due*