

## Syllabus

IAH 231C Themes and Issues: Roles of Language in Society.

Language as the medium of culture in various societies. Power and social identity as manifested through language. Students are introduced to diverse methods and materials from the arts and humanities.

Mechanisms underlying language diversity and similarity.

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Integrative Studies in Arts and Humanities at MSU seeks to assist students to become more familiar with ways of knowing in the arts and humanities and to be more knowledgeable and capable in a range of intellectual and expressive abilities. IAH courses encourage students to engage critically with their own society, history, and culture(s); they also encourage students to learn more about the history and culture of other societies. They focus on key ideas and issues in human experience; encourage appreciation of the roles of knowledge and values in shaping and understanding human behavior; emphasize the responsibilities and opportunities of democratic citizenship; highlight the value of the creative arts of literature, theater, music, and arts; and alert us to important issues that occur among peoples in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world.

### 1. Course outline

This course explores the psychological, social and neuropsychological mechanisms responsible for scope and limits of human language variation. We will examine how child language acquisition, historical change, second language acquisition, the structure of the human mind/brain, as well as other sociological, psychological and neurological factors contribute to the observed diversity of human languages. The course will concentrate on the following aspects of language structure: sentence structure (syntax), word structure (morphology), and meaning (semantics). It will be shown that there are no inferior languages. Languages like Black Vernacular English, or Haitian Creole will be shown to be just as rich in vocabulary and grammatically 'complex' as Latin. And, more importantly, they will be shown to be determined by the same biological and social factors as any other language. The course draws from the fields of theoretical linguistics, sociology, psychology, biology, and anthropology.

### 2. Requirements

1. Weekly homework	30%
2. Attendance/Participation	10%
2. Midterm	25%
3. Final exam	35%

### 3. Grading

The course will be graded out of 100 based on the percentages given above. The following scale will be used for assigning grades:

90-100	4.0	70-74	2.0
85-89	3.5	65-69	1.5
80-84	3.0	60-64	1.0
75-79	2.5	00-59	0.0

If you have more than three unjustified absences your grade will be reduced by 0.5 point. Beyond 3 absences, additional 0.5 points will be deducted per class.

**4. Group Homework:** Homework is in the form of Problem Sets (PSets), which are usually due one week from the date assigned. All PSets will be done in small groups of 3 people. Group membership will be randomly assigned. You will work with the same group for 3 PSets, at which point new groups will be assigned (again randomly). So over the course of the semester, you will be in 3 different groups. Problem sets may not be turned in late. There will be no exceptions to these rules. The grade for the group is the grade that all members of the group receive.

Class Web Page: Homework will be posted on the class web page. I will always e-mail a link to the homework when it is assigned.

Office hours: Wells Hall C611 Monday 4:45-5:45, Thursday 4:45-5:45  
Tel: 517 355-7491

### 5. Academic Integrity

Please consult:

<http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/RegsOrdsPolicies.html>

### 6. Sources

Textbook: Child Language: Acquisition and Growth (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics)  
Barbara C. Lust. CUP 2006 (CL)

Additional sources (available via MSU electronic resources, or on the web. Materials will be posted on the course webpage):

1. Salikoko Mufene (SM): <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mufwene/goodies.html>
  - A. Creolization is a Social, not a Structural, Process
  - B. Pidgins and Creoles: An Overview
  - C. The Comparability of New-Dialect Formation and Creole Development
  - D. Ebonics and Standard English
2. Michel DeGraff. On the origin of Creoles: A Cartesian critique of Neo-Darwinian linguistics. *Linguistic Typology* 5.2/3, 2001.
3. Michel DeGraff Linguists' most dangerous myth: The fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism *Language in Society*, Volume 34, Issue 04, Oct 2005, pp 533-591.

4. Lisa Green. Research on African American English Since 1998: Origins, Description, Theory, and Practice. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 9 2004; vol. 32: pp. 210 - 229.
5. Walter Edwards. Aspectual In African American vernacular English in Detroit. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, Volume 5, Issue 3: 413-427.
6. Ronald R. Butters. When is English 'Black English Vernacular'? *Journal of English Linguistics*, 3 1984; vol. 17: pp. 29 - 36.
7. Walt Wolfram. The Relationship of White Southern Speech to Vernacular Black English *Language* Vol. 50, No. 3 (Sep., 1974), pp. 498-527.
8. Gary A. Cziko Testing the Language Bioprogram Hypothesis: A Review of Children's Acquisition of Articles *Language* > Vol. 62, No. 4 (Dec., 1986), pp. 878-898.

In the schedule below readings are referred to as CL, SM, or by respective number:

## 7. Weekly schedule

Week 1.

- 5.14. What is Language: psychological and sociological dimension. Introduction to the aims of the course.
  - 5.15. Language variation as a product of acquisition (CL ch.1)
  - 5.16. Language and the cognitive system (CL Ch.2.1)
  - 5.17. Language and the cognitive system cd.
- Homework 1. In points, and using examples provide two arguments for and two against language being a cognitive system. 5.24.

Week 2.

- 5.21. What is language acquisition? (CL Ch3)
  - 5.22. Approaches to Language Acquisition - rationalist vs. empiricist (CL Ch4)
  - 5.23. Brain Mechanisms in language acquisition (CL Ch.5)
  - 5.24. Neural aspects: Sign Language, Language disorders (CL Ch. 5.3-5.11)
- Homework 2. Using examples, provide two arguments for the rationalist and two arguments for the empiricist approach to language acquisition. Due 5.31.

Week 3.

- 5.28. Holiday
  - 5.29. Social Mechanisms in Language acquisition (CL Ch.6.1-6.2)
  - 5.30. Nature of the input (CL Ch6.3-6.4)
  - 5.31. Overview
- Homework 3. Using examples, in points compare social and neural aspects of language acquisition. Due 6.7.

Week 4.

- 6.4. Midterm exam
- 6.5. Variation in sentence structure, syntactic acquisition, and inconsistent input: Creoles (CL Ch. 9.1 -9.2)

6.6. Sociological factors in Creole creation (CL Ch9.3), (SM A,B)

6.7. Syntactic properties of creoles (CL Ch9.4) (2)

Homework 4. On the basis of provided data argue that certain aspects of Haitian Creole result from inconsistent input. Due 6.14.

Week 5

6.11. Studying the emergence of Creoles (3)

6.12. Creoles and dialects (SM C)

6.13. Variation in vocabulary, acquisition of semantics (CL Ch10.1)

6.14. Learning Concepts (CL Ch.10.2)

Homework 6. Discuss the similarities and differences between Creole and dialect formation. Due end of week 6.21.

Week 6

6.18. Categorical thought (CL Ch10.3)

6.19. Vocabulary variation, case study African American Vernacular English (CL Ch. 10.4-10.5, SM D)

6.20. Research on AAVE, and its origins (4,5)

6.21. Syntactic Properties of AAVE (6,7)

Homework7. Write a 'legal' brief arguing for adopting the teaching of AAVE in schools. Due 6.26

Week 7

6.25. Nature of language growth (CL. Ch 11) (8)

6.26. Models of language variation (CL Ch.12.1-12.5)

6.27. Overview

6.28. Exam