Credits: 3 credit hours; may be taken for graduate credit with permission
Prerequisites: ANTH 4 or equivalent, or permission of the instructor (note: students in media, public affairs, law, international affairs (including development), etc. who have with special interests in how language works are encouraged)

Class dates: August 28 - December 4
Location: Anthropology Discourse Lab (or as specially scheduled)
Time: Tuesday afternoons: 5:10-7:00 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Marilyn Merritt (Marilyn Wilkey Merritt)
Email: mmerritt@gwu.edu
Phone: 202-994-6075 (message through Department of Anthropology)
Office hours: Tuesdays 3-4 pm and by appointment: Note that each student is expected to confer independently with the instructor at least once during the semester, either before or after class or at some other mutually convenient time (office in 2110 G St NW, B01).

OVERVIEW: This course introduces students to what has become a primary approach of linguistic anthropology to studying language in use – the analysis of discourse in naturalistic settings, or the ethnographic analysis of speech and speaking. Both the ethnography of communication and discourse analysis are also, by their very nature, interdisciplinary subject areas, to which many intellectual traditions have contributed. As an area of named research and scholarship, discourse analysis is a relatively new field, emerging in the 1950’s out of new developments in linguistics (itself a relatively new (20th century) independent discipline), and rapidly evolving in the 1960’s, 70’s, and 80’s through contributions from other humanities, social sciences, and applied interests – continuing into an ongoing state of vibrant scholarship and research. The ethnography of speaking and communication emerged as a named field in early 1960’s. This course will provide a sense of this intellectual history and set the stage for direct involvement with analyzing ethnographically situated discourse that is of interest to the class. The course thus provides a substantial introduction to the methodology of analyzing speech and discourse in natural settings that may serve the interests of general anthropology and other scholarly disciplines, as well as linguistic anthropology.

Selecting appropriate discourse samples will benefit from some review of theoretical assumptions about the structure of language, language socialization, the flow of linguistic genres and tropes throughout society, and the ways in which (the hegemony of) social
practices depend upon how individuals use language in social situations. Students will be encouraged to consider what they are hoping to find out through a careful analysis of discourse, what would be their ideal source of data for analysis, and what might be the constraints to gaining access to such a source and interpreting the results. Ultimately, the course will focus on specific methods and techniques for analyzing and ethnographically interpreting language data that can be represented as a textual transcript. Particular attention will be given to conversational materials and texts that were “originally performed” in oral/aural settings.

Students will learn the basic conventions for transcribing speech data, and become familiar with the technical vocabulary for describing language data as it occurs in social settings and social interaction. Students will also learn how to examine their data samples for “meaningful patterns” and to write interpretative accounts or analyses that can form the basis for argumentation. In most cases the fundamental query will be, “What’s going on?” and how is that interpretation supported by the data (and what analytical concepts and assumptions are made use of to get there).

For those with interest in gaining fluency in transcription skills and using software that affords some quantitative analysis of larger sets of data (corpora), students will have the opportunity to use the technological resources of the Discourse Lab (which will also serve as the regular classroom for the course).

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

The course format will be a combination of observation sharing, discussion of readings, lecture, general discussion and collaborative analysis or workshop based on data presented in class. There will be at least three brief individual written assignments in addition to the final project to be orally presented as well as written.

The course readings will focus on two required texts that will be covered in entirety:


Also recommended is the text by James Paul Gee (An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Routledge, 2010), available in the bookstore. In addition to the texts, additional readings will be recommended throughout the semester, and students will be required to choose at least three of these, on which to write a brief summary, and report orally to the class. Students are also encouraged to search for readings on the own, according to particular interests, and to share findings with the class.

Aug 28   Introduction

Sep 4    Johnstone, Chaps 1 and 2 (pp 1-77)

Sep 11   Johnstone, Chap 3 (78-101)
Sep 18  Johnstone, Chap 3 (101-128); Sidnell Chaps 1 and 2 (1-36)
Sep 25  Sidnell, Chaps 3 – 5 (37- 94)
Oct  2  Sidnell, Chaps 6 – 8 (95 – 173)
Oct  9  Sidnell, Chaps 9 - 10 (174 – 222)
Oct 16  Sidnell, Chaps 11-13 (223 – 280)
Oct 23 Johnstone, Chap 4
Oct 30 Johnstone, Chap 5
Nov  6  Johnstone, Chap 6
Nov 13 Johnstone, Chap 7
Nov 20 Johnstone, Chap 8
Nov 27 Review and final project presentations
Dec  4  Final project presentations

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students are expected to attend all classes, and to come prepared to discuss readings and personal observations made in the course of the week. Class participation will count 40% of the final grade. Students may also be expected to write brief mini-essay/analyses in class on an ad hoc basis. These and short written assignments will count approximately 40% of the final grade, and the final project will count approximately 20%.

LEARNING GOALS:

Students should be able to select data, observe and make transcriptions, and develop analyses that reflect an interpretation of the linguistic, social and cultural significance of the material. They should develop a sense of what an “ethnographic” approach to speech involves, and be able to implement basic methods of discourse analysis, including an understanding of the theoretical assumptions upon which their analyses are based.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I personally support the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)
Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER (UCC) 202-994-5300
The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
- confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals

http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices

SECURITY
In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.