

Language in Culture and Society

Anthropology 1004.10

Spring 2014

Instructor: Dr. Alexander S. Dent

Lecture Time: T & R 9:35 am – 10: 25 am

Lecture Location: Fungler 103

Instructor Email: asdent@gwu.edu

Phone: 202.994.5084

Office Location: 2110 G. St. Rm. 302
(Hortense Amsterdam House)

Office hours: T 11am – 1PM

Or by appointment

Section Times:

Section 30 – R 8 am – 8:50 am – Duques 362

Section 31 – R 2:20pm -3:10pm – Duques 250

Section 32 – R 3:55pm-4:45pm – OM 312

Section 33 – R 3:55pm – 4:45pm – MON 114

Section 34 – R 5pm –5:50pm GOV 101

Section 35 – R 5pm – 5:50pm – OM 312

TA Emails

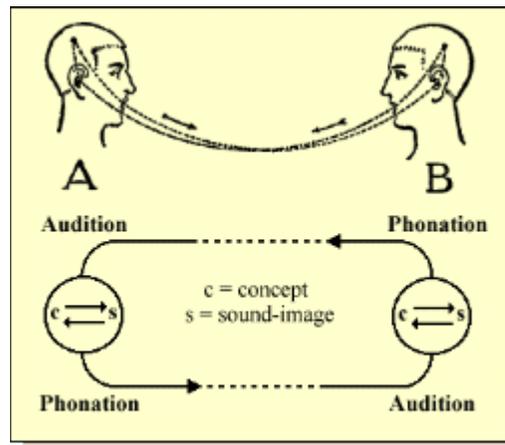
Sarah Richardson – slrichardson@gwu.edu

Devin Proctor – dproctor@gwu.edu

TA office Hours – 2110 G St. Basement

Richardson - Thursday 1:45-3:45 pm or by appointment

Proctor - Tuesday 2:00-4:00 pm or by appointment



Introduction

Where did language come from? How does it work? What are the relationships between languages and the cultural contexts in which they are spoken? Indeed, can language and culture be separated at all?

This course seeks to answer these questions in two modes: biological and cultural. After a brief introduction to the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure, we explore the evolution of language, making use of biological anthropology and archaeology. Our overarching question in this first half of the class will be how language evolved as it did. In the second half we explore the cultural ways that people use language to communicate, employing comparative and ethnographic approaches to examine social categories such as gender, race, and identity. Our major question in this second half will be how language works. While we will briefly treat the technical-descriptive procedures associated with anthropological linguistics, we will focus on the use of language to understand and interpret broader social and evolutionary issues.

One of the primary purposes of this course is to understand the tensions between a traditional, “linguistics,” definition of language, and the definition of language that emerges from cross-cultural comparison. You may to return to the customary perception of language as vocabulary and grammar after you have completed this course, but during the semester, I expect you to master the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspectives that the readings and lectures present. All assignments in this course, exams, quiz, paper, and class participation, are geared towards your critical understanding of the comparison of languages and cultures, even when the cases

2 – Anthropology 1004.10 – Spring 2014 – Dent

might appear to be familiar to you.

ANTH 1004 introduces the linguistics component of the anthropology major, as well as further courses in linguistic anthropology.

This is a challenging course, even though it is an “introductory” course. Though I do not curve, by and large, one third of the class gets an A of some kind, one third gets a B, and one third gets a C. The amount of time you spend outside of class on the readings may vary, but students who want an A should expect to spend *more* than six hours a week preparing for class. Students who spend about six hours will most likely end up with a B. And students who spend less than six hours on their preparation will probably end up with a C.

Please note that early drafts of the syllabus sometimes contain typos. The working copy of the syllabus is always the one available on Blackboard.

Learning Goals (specific)

By the end of this class, students will be able to:

- understand the significant biological aspects of the human capacity for language
- understand the major cultural aspects of the human capacity for language
- distinguish the more “traditional” view of language found in the discipline of linguistics from an anthropological perspective on language as sign-related behavior
- be able to use anthropological concepts of culture, frame, genre, performance, and mediation to interpret social categories such as race, gender, and social class

Learning Goals (general)

This course will contribute to student mastery of:

- critical thinking skills, where critical thinking is defined as analyzing and engaging with the concepts that underlie an argument
- cross-cultural perspectives, where international institutions and practices are analyzed, and the importance of cultural knowledge is emphasized as a fundamental aspect of human nature
- written communication skills, which will be evaluated in the short paper, quiz, and exams; oral communication skills will be evaluated through “class participation,” though oral communication skills will not necessarily be a primary focus

Course Requirements

1) Class participation, and attendance – 20 % (5 – participation; 15 -- attendance at lectures and discussion sections – see below)

Absences will have a profound effect on each grade for a variety of reasons. First, all material from discussions, lectures, films, and readings will be tested on the midterm and final. But also, knowledge will be cumulative, and in lectures, I will reference previous topics. For this reason, students must: 1) attend every lecture and discussion section; 2) complete reading for that class before the class; 3) complete in-class assignments; 4) contribute to in-class discussion, some of which will take place in small groups; and 5) practice ‘academic integrity’ (see below). There will be no make-ups for missed assignments, or exams (don’t oversleep on the morning of the midterm). Based on your comments in lecture and discussion section, in consultation with your TA, I will award five (5) points for in-class participation, so if you want to do well in class, speak up; in borderline cases, this seemingly tiny five percent can make a difference. – **total of 5 pts. for participation**

In order to monitor attendance at lectures, periodically, and without prior notice, I will ask a simple question at some point during class based on the lecture or some aspect of the reading for that day. This question will **not** be difficult, and anyone who has been paying attention during the class will be able to get it correct. You will take out a sheet of paper, write your name, discussion section number and TA, and

3 – Anthropology 1004.10 – Spring 2014 – Dent

answer the question. You will then bring your paper to the front of the class, and place that paper into the correct pile for your section. You will then receive one point, but note that you are responsible for making sure that all the required information is on the sheet and the sheet is placed into the correct pile, otherwise, the point will not be awarded. I will do this nine times over the course of the semester, and we will select the top eight. (This means you can miss one of these without it affecting your grade.) Note that I may do this at the beginning of class, so be on time. If you are not in class that day, you will receive a zero. These are not scheduled in advance, which means that if you miss a class, you risk missing one. There will be no make-ups for these missed in-class questions. (If you hand in one of these for an absent friend, trying to “cover” for them, you will both receive zero, and if this occurs more than once, it will be treated as a violation of academic integrity.) – **total of 8 pts. for lecture attendance**

Attendance at all weekly discussion sections is mandatory. Your TA will distribute a sign-up sheet at the beginning of each discussion section. You will receive ½ point for each class, so if you miss a class, not only are you putting yourself at risk of missing important material, but you’re also losing points. Weekly discussion sections will include small assignments that will contribute to your participation grade; failure to complete these tasks will result in deductions from your participation grade. (Signing in for someone who is not present in order to cover for them will mean that both you **and** the other person do not receive credit for that class. This will be treated as a violation of academic integrity.) – **total of 7 pts.**

If you need to miss a class or lecture for a **religious holiday**, you need to let your TA know within the first two weeks of class. Any last minute religious absence requests, after the first two weeks of class, cannot be honored.

2) In-Class Quiz – 5% -- January 28th

This quiz will consist of “Concepts, Processes, and People” (CPP) questions, and will be challenging. I will provide more details on this quiz in class, but please note that it will require substantial preparation and in-class writing. This quiz is intended to prepare you for the midterm.

3) Midterm exam -- 25% -- March 6th

The exam will consist of CPP questions, and short essays. It will take up an entire class period, and will take place in the same location as our regular class. It will not just be a test of what you “know,” or how “hard” you studied, but of your capacity to tell us what you know and communicate how hard you studied in a limited amount of time. There will be no makeups for missing the midterm; do not “accidentally oversleep.”

4) Short paper – 20% -- April 10th

4-5 pp. ethnography (observation & analysis, 12pt. font, standard margins, double spaced) paper on the role of language in a religious service.

This paper asks you to critically evaluate course concepts by applying them to a particular religious service that you observe. You should observe a religious service in one of several modes: 1) in standard English; 2) in non-standard English (for example, AAVE, or some other non-standard form); 3) in a language other than English that you DO understand (a service in Spanish, German, or Italian, for example). A service held entirely in a language that you do NOT understand (option 4) is not out of the question, but makes the assignment more difficult; make sure you consult with your TA if you choose this fourth option.

Go to the service, and pay special attention to LANGUAGE. What kinds of language are being used in the ceremony, and how can you tell that different kinds of tasks are being accomplished through that language? For instance, is some language read directly from text-artifacts (readings or prayers), while other language is improvised (sermons, homilies)? If this is the case, what different kinds of tasks do these different forms of language target? Give examples.

4 – Anthropology 1004.10 – Spring 2014 – Dent

Write a short paper analyzing some aspect of language-use in the ceremony according to a concept, or perhaps two or three concepts, from the course (frames, gender, race, identity, genre, performance, are all excellent candidates, though there are many others). But note the purpose of the assignment, which is to evaluate the concepts. Do they work, when applied to your data, or do they require revising?

You want to convey your sense of language-use within this particular ceremony, so make sure to provide some descriptive details about what you're seeing/hearing. But make certain that your descriptive details concern language (or some form of sign-related behavior), and make certain you are anchoring your analysis both in course concepts, AND in that particular ceremony. It is often better to select one single detail (the alternation between prayers and sung hymns, for example, or the role of pronunciation) rather than trying to cover absolutely everything that takes place.

You will need to plan ahead in order to accomplish this by the deadline. Search carefully for churches, temples, or other religious spaces and services. You will probably want to call ahead for times and dates, especially if you are using the to research a location, as sites are sometimes poorly maintained.

Before or after the service, interview someone knowledgeable from this religious community and ask them about the history of speech in the church/synagogue/temple/etc.: Has it always been this way? How has it changed? How do they see the different kinds of language that get used in the ceremony?

[Note – it is important to let them know that you are a student at GWU, that you are doing a class project, that you have NO intention of publishing this material, that you will use a pseudonym for them in your paper, and that not only do they **not** have to participate, but they can end participation at any time if they would like to. Always get permission if you want to record someone. It is crucial that you present yourself as a student, and not someone who wants to join their church – which is unethical.]

The paper is due at the **start** of class on April 10th. I deduct 1/3 of a grade for each day the paper is late. Thus, at 9:36 am, April 10th, the paper is a day late. By a third of a grade, I mean that if your paper was an A, but you turned it in to me a day late, it automatically becomes an A-. If it was an A-, it becomes a B+. And so forth.

Your paper, for a total of twenty points, will be evaluated based on:
2pts – Thesis
5pts – Structure of the overall paper
5pts – Analysis that is supported by concepts and citations from the course
5pts – Logic and argumentation
3pts – Style, grammar, and use of social sciences notation form

5) Final exam – 30% -- Time and Location TBA

The exam will consist of CPP questions, short essays, and a long essay. The exam is **cumulative** – which means to say that it covers the entire semester. You should avoid making plane reservations for the summer until the date has been announced by the GWU administration, and confirmed by the instructor.

Grading scale for final grade:

A	93% or higher
A-	90-92%
B+	88-89%
B	83-7%
B-	80-82% ... and so on ...

A word about grading: Please understand that to get an A in this class, your work needs to be outstanding, not merely competent. Merely coming to class, doing the reading, and basically staying on top of things

5 – Anthropology 1004.10 – Spring 2014 – Dent

usually garners a low B or high C.

Academic Integrity

All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work, and when you use the words and ideas of others in any written work, you must: 1) identify quotations with quotations marks; and 2) indicate the source of ideas that are not your own using social sciences notation form. If you have any questions at all about what this means, you should speak to the instructor. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity (for example, the sale of lecture-notes from this class, or use of content from the internet as though it was your own), will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. For more information on The George Washington University's policies on academic integrity, consult: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

The policy on academic integrity in this course is that if you commit a breach of academic integrity in any assignment or exam, you will receive a zero for that assignment or exam. This infraction will be reported to the University's Academic Integrity Council. You will be **clearly** notified by the instructor in person OR by email before the Council is informed.

Special Needs

Please let me or your TA know right away if you have any special needs with respect to how this course will be conducted. Don't wait to do this. If you need extra time for exams, you have to register with DSS; please let us know if you need to do this, and don't wait.

Reading

Required reading will be available in the GW bookstore. Other chapters and articles will be available on the course's Blackboard site, or Electronic Reserves in Blackboard – hereafter referred to as **ER**.

Required Books

- Agar, Michael. 1996. *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation*. NY: Harper ("Agar" below).
- Aitchison, Jean. 2000. *Seeds of Speech: Language Origin and Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press ("Aitchison" below).
- Rickford, Russell. 2000. *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: Wiley ("Rickford" below).

A Few "Do's" and "Do Not's"

- a) **Do not** email me or your TA asking for a class outline for a class that you missed. Make a "note-buddy" on the first day of class, and get the class outline from that note-buddy if you should miss a class for some reason.
- b) **Do not** email me or your TA with reasons that you will miss a class, or reasons that you missed one. Reasons for missing a class are limited, and include an emergency in your immediate family (distant relations, I fear, do not count), or some kind of medical condition or emergency for which you can provide documentation.
- c) **Do** come and talk to me or your TA early in the semester about questions or concerns about the course. Leaving these till the last minute can lead to frustration.
- d) **Do** come to talk to me or your TA about your paper topic and approach. Make sure that if you come to talk to me, that you let your TA know that our conversation has taken place.
- e) As a matter of fact, **do** come to talk to me with questions or comments about the course, even if they don't seem shatteringly important. My office hours belong to you.
- f) **Do** show up to class on time. I actually DO notice late arrivals, often by name.

6 – Anthropology 1004.10 – Spring 2014 – Dent

Section I: Linguistics – Its Politics & History

Week 1

T 1/14 -- Introduction

How can the study of language help us understand culture?

How can it help us understand “human nature”?

R 1/16 – The Study of Language

Reading:

Agar, “Preface.” Pp. 7-9.

“Culture Blends.” Pp. 13-30.

“The Circle.” Pp. 31-48. (36)

Week 2

T 1/21 – The Saussurian Turn

What important concepts were introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure?

Reading:

Agar, “The Circle and the Field.” Pp. 49-60.

“Cultural Signifieds.” Pp. 61-72. (22)

R 1/23 – Language and Culture

What contributions were made by Boas, Sapir, Whorf, Bloomfield, and Malinowski?

Reading:

Agar, “Similarities & Differences.” Pp. 73-88.

“Situations.” Pp. 89-107.

“Culture.” Pp. 108-139. (64)

Recommended:

Lyons, From Noam Chomsky. “Modern Linguistics: Aims and Attitudes.” Pp. 8-19. ER

“The ‘Bloomfieldians.’” Pp. 20-28. ER (19)

Week 3

T 1/28 – Brief review and in-class quiz

Section II -- Language and Human Nature

R 1/30 – Origins of Complex Communication

Does language define us as uniquely human?

Why did language develop into something so complex?

Reading:

Aitchison, chapter one “A Natural Curiosity.” Pp. 3-15.

chapter two “A Peculiar Habit.” Pp. 16-25.

chapter three “The Bother at Babel.” Pp. 26-37. (32)

Week 4

7 – Anthropology 1004.10 – Spring 2014 – Dent

T 2/4 – Complexity, Continued

Reading:

Aitchison, chapter four “Distinct Duties.” Pp. 38-48.
chapter five “The Family Tree.” Pp. 49-64. (25)

R 2/6 – Grooming and Gossiping

What functions might language have evolved to perform?

Reading:

Aitchison, chapter six “A Devious Mind.” Pp. 65-76.
chapter seven “Broken Air.” Pp. 77-92. (26)

Week 5

T 2/11 – Communicating Critters

In-class film: “Signs of the Apes, Songs of the Whales.”

R 2/13 – Animal Communication, pt. II

Reading:

In Aitchison, chapter eight, “Small beginnings.” Pp. 93-106.
chapter nine “The Second Word.” Pp. 107-122. (28)

Week 6

T 2/18 – Learning Language

How do children learn to use language?

In-class film: “Baby Talk.”

R 2/20 – Learning Language, Learning Culture

Reading:

Ochs & Schieffelin, “Language Acquisition and Language Socialization.” Pp. 263-301. ER (38)

Lecture will be delivered on Blackboard (digitally) – regular discussions will take place with no changes

Week 7

T 2/25 – The Case of Color

Do all people see the world in the same way?

Or does each language provide a unique set of lenses for interpreting experience?

Reading:

Berlin & Kay, “Introduction” to Basic Color Terms. Pp. 1-23. ER

Conklin, “Hanunoo Color Categories.” Pp. 189-192. ER (25)

R 2/27 -- Pidgins & Creoles

Are there primitive languages?

Do creoles provide a glimpse into the origin of language?

Reading:

In Aitchison, chapter ten “The tower of speech.” Pp. 123-134.

chapter eleven “Time-traveling.” Pp. 135-147.

chapter twelve “Rebuilding on the high seas” Pp. 148-160. (35)

Week 8

8 – **Anthropology 1004.10** – Spring 2014 – Dent
T 3/4 – Review (still an obligatory class)

R 3/6 – Midterm (same as class location)

Week 9 – Spring Break

T 3/11 – no class

R 3/13 – definitely no class

Section III – Language, Context & Culture

Week 10

T 3/18 – **Ways people talk**

In-class film: American Tongues.

Rickford, chapter 6, “Vocabulary and Pronunciation.” Pp. 91-108. (17)

R 3/20 – **Phonology**

Reading:

Pinker, Steven. “Sounds of Silence” The Language Instinct, chapter 6. Pp. 153-189. ER (36)

Week 11

T 3/25 -- **Syntax**

Reading:

Rickford, chapter 7, “Grammar.” Pp. 109-128. (19)

R 3/27 – **Speech Acts**

Reading:

Agar, “Speech Acts.” Pp. 140-163.

“Speech Act Lumber and Paint.” Pp. 164-191. (50)

Week 12

T 4/1 – **Identity I**

Reading:

Rickford, chapter 12 “The Crucible of Identity.” Pp. 223-232. (9)

Agar, “Coherence.” Pp. 192-210. (18)

R 4/3 – **Identity II**

Reading:

Rickford, chapter 1 “What’s Going On?” Pp. 3-12.

chapter 3 “Preachers and Pray-ers.” Pp. 39-56.

chapter 4 “Comedians and Actors.” Pp. 57-72 (41)

Week 13

T 4/8– **Gender I**

What role does language play in shaping gender roles?

Reading:

Kuipers, Joel. “Talking about Troubles: Gender Differences in Weyewa Ritual Speech Use.” Pp. 448-462. ER (14)

9 – **Anthropology 1004.10** – Spring 2014 – Dent

R 4/10 – Gender II

Paper due at the beginning of class.

Hall, Kira. “Lip Service in the Fantasy Lines.” Pp. 183-218. **ER** (35)

Week 14

T 4/15 -- Performance

Bauman & Briggs. “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life.” Pp. 59-88. **ER** (29)

R 4/17 -- Mediation

Spitulnik. “The Social Circulation of Media Discourse and the Mediation of Communities.” **ER**

Week 15

T 4/22 – Language & Music: Voice

What is the relationship between language and artistic expression, in particular, music?

Reading:

Feld, Fox, Porcello, & Samuels. “Vocal Anthropology.” Pp. 321-346. **ER** (25)

R 4/24 – Review

FINAL EXAM: Date and Time TBA, according to the GWU official schedule – Location will be the same as class location. Do not make plane reservations for summer plans until the GW administration has announced the official exam schedule, and the instructor has confirmed it in class.