

LING 5320: Sociolinguistic Variation Fall 2023

What will I learn?

Language varies: within speakers, across speakers, and over time. This course is a theoretical and practical introduction to **variationist sociolinguistics**, the subfield of linguistics concerned with understanding the relationship between variation and language change and with describing and accounting for variation in terms of the linguistic and social factors which underlie it. What are the objects of study in sociolinguistic research? What kinds of questions can we ask about the relationship between language and society, and how do we use quantitative methods to find their answers? We'll address these foundational issues, read classic and contemporary papers in the field – about old fishermen, young Philadelphians, nerd girls, frat guys, Kiwi radio announcers, Danish urbanites, and other remarkable language users – and apply what we've learned to group and individual projects exploring cases of variation.

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

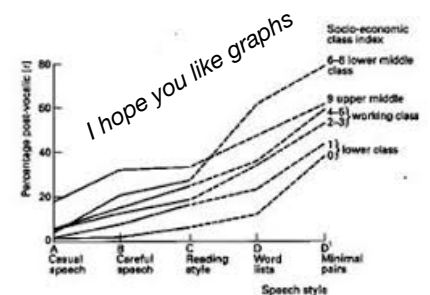
- 1) Read, understand, and critically evaluate literature from the field of variationist sociolinguistics
- 2) Articulate the major research approaches to studying language variation and change
- 3) Use the methods of variationist sociolinguistics to analyze novel data
- 4) Conduct your own small-scale sociolinguistic projects

Your guide

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 249 Poulton
 Office hours: Weds 2:30pm-4:30pm
 or
 By Appt: nycz.youcanbookme.com

Where to find stuff

All readings and assignments will be posted to the course Canvas site; check this site regularly!



Cuz you're gonna see (& make) a lotta graphs

What's expected of me?

In-class writing & other engagement

(20% of your grade) We will begin many of our classes with a short writing activity based on the reading you did for class that day. I will provide some prompt (e.g. a question, a statement with which you might agree or disagree, a piece of data to consider) and you will spend a few minutes writing down your thoughts. The purpose of this activity is to get you warmed up for the discussion of the day and improve the quality of that discussion; as such, there are no in-class writing make-ups. These will be graded on a three-point scale (2: thoughtful response that draws on the reading to address the prompt; 1: response which doesn't address the prompt; 0: no response). Other small ad hoc tasks that I ask you to do in class or in preparation for class also fall into this bin; *for the most part*, if you just do these things (or show up to class and do the things), you will get full credit for the things.

Data processing & analysis

assignments (30%) We will collaboratively carry out a project examining variation in recorded speech. In conjunction with this project, you will have 3 assignments intended to give you hands-on experience working through various key steps of a variationist analysis. Completing these assignments will help you plan and complete your final project.

Final project (35%) You will conduct a small-scale research project investigating linguistic variation at any level of language (e.g. phonetic, phonological, morphosyntactic) in any language. Your analysis must be quantitative and variationist in nature, though it can also incorporate qualitative elements. You will carry out your project alone or in a group of 2-3, with the scope of the project depending on the number of investigators. If working in a group, you may choose to submit a single group paper (which will receive one group grade) or individual papers (individual grades); you will also present your work to the class in the penultimate week of the term. The final project grade will be determined based on your work process as well as the final product, the final project grade based on your project proposal, three progress reports, class presentation, and the final paper.

Participation (15%) This portion of the grade is a way for me to give you credit for informal/unstructured collaborative work that you do. Participation and collaboration are strong predictors of success and learning retention, so please make an effort to find a way that works well for you to participate and engage with your colleagues. See the Canvas site for more on how to participate.

You are expected to attend class in person. In addition to lecture, we will have class activities designed to strengthen your knowledge of the material; we will also discuss many of the issues that arise from your readings and how they connect to the principles of sociolinguistics. As such, missing class is to your detriment. I will not grade attendance per se, but missing class means missing in-class writing assignments (each of which is worth a small part of your grade, but many absences will have an effect). If you must miss class for illness or other reasons, I appreciate a heads-up beforehand; please consult the Canvas site and be in touch with a peer in the class to catch up on what you missed.

I expect you to do the assigned readings before each class and participate in synchronous class discussions to the best of your ability. I recognize that these are strange times, and what constitutes your 'best' may fluctuate. Please let me know if you are having difficulties attending class sessions or keeping up; we will figure out a way forward.

Laptops and tablets are okay for taking notes or referring to readings in class, though I will provide handouts to encourage handwritten notes. I will also do my best to help everyone participate frequently (read: expect to be called on often, perhaps especially if you are behind a screen!)

What's the weekly schedule like?

Each week we will focus on a specific topic relevant to understanding language variation. A Canvas page for each week will be posted with that week's readings, activities, & any short class-prep assignments, no later than the preceding Thursday.

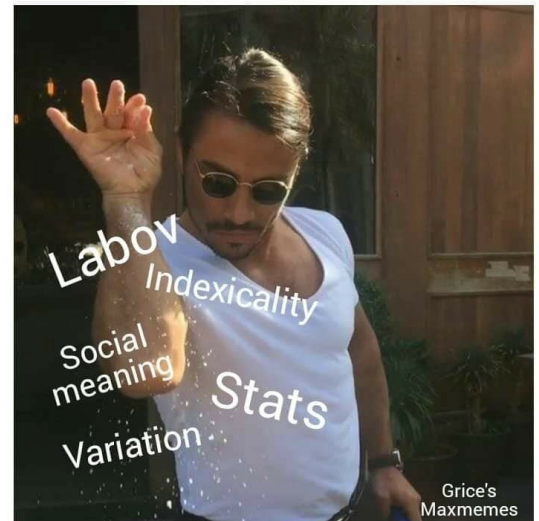
We will meet in person on campus on Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30-1:45.

My office hours will be Wednesday from 2:30-4:30 in Poulton 249 (so you can catch me while class is still fresh in your mind) but I will have availability for meetings at various other times (usually Monday afternoons). You can just show up in person to Wednesday office hours or book times to meet with me in person or over Zoom (see link on page 1). If you can't find a spot there, just send me an email and we'll work something out.

Bigger out-of-class assignments & project pieces will nearly always be due Thursdays by 5pm. This will enable me to process them and send you feedback on Friday.

You are expected to do the assigned readings before each class and participate in synchronous class discussions to the best of your ability*. Larger assignments in the first half of the semester will take you through a variationist workflow as part of a class project; in the second half of the semester, your main focus will be on working through your own individual or small group project. Throughout the semester you will work through regular in-class writing or other tasks and a few out-of-class activities (some assigned, some choose-your-own-adventure) to help support your learning of and thinking about course concepts.

How to sound like a sociolinguist



How do I communicate with Jen & others in the class?

If you have a question about class logistics or a specific assignment (or any other topic that one of your peers might conceivably have as well), please post it in the discussion board on Canvas or (preferably) on the class Discord. This way other can benefit from my answer (also, someone else in the class might catch it and help you out before I see it).

If you have more "personal" business (e.g. notifying me of an absence, or questions that are specific to you), drop by office hours or send me an email! I try not to check work email after a certain point in the evening (6pm-ish), so just know that I may not see your after-hours messages until the next morning.

I highly recommend you also form some kind of class group chat that *doesn't* include me, where you can discuss course work and ask questions you'd rather ask of peers than professor-types. Nominate someone to organize this during the first week of classes!

