

# LING 23850/33850: Sociolinguistic Typology

## Winter 2021

T, Th 2:40-4:00 pm  
Stuart 105

Instructor: Jessica Kantarovich  
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Office hours: By appointment (Rosenwald 205G or Zoom)

## Course Description

Language is a fundamentally social phenomenon: it is used by individuals in the context of a larger society. Language and society can condition one another: language use and even aspects of linguistic grammar are negotiated within the society and shaped by the society, and are in turn used and understood by speakers to signal something about society. This symbiotic relationship between society and language will be explored by this class. We will apply the study of linguistic typology—which describes and classifies linguistic structures and their functions—to the sociolinguistic dimensions of language structure. Unlike a traditional sociolinguistics class, we will focus not on the ways that different social groups use language, but rather which aspects of language tend to be most intrinsically tied to social structure and more likely to be leveraged by speakers for social purposes. We will also consider the ways that different types of societies can be shown to have a direct effect on language variation and change, especially in cases of multilingualism.

## Course Objectives

In the course of this class, students will:

1. Become acquainted with the range of variation in the world's languages and how linguists categorize properties of language
2. Learn about linguistic phenomena that can only be understood in a particular socio-cultural context, such as social deixis, ritual language use, etc.
3. Understand which aspects of language become more saliently associated by speakers with certain social functions, and why
4. Understand how the structure and history of a particular society can produce certain types of languages or language features
5. Gain experience writing an independent research paper in linguistics, and receive the necessary training to do so

## Assignments

- (a) **Readings.** There will be assigned reading for every class. It is expected that you will have read the assigned pages *before* class. I will lecture on unfamiliar linguistic concepts and unpack important themes from the texts; however, you should be prepared to seriously discuss the content.
- (b) **Discussion posts.** To foster discussion and get you thinking about the readings, I will ask you to submit a discussion post to Canvas by 9 AM before every class.

### *Guidelines for discussion posts:*

I expect the “discussion post” is a familiar format to most of you. To give you some context for what is expected in this particular class: your discussion post should be analytic in nature. It should go beyond pointing out a confusing concept, stating whether you liked or disliked the reading, or summarizing the reading. You should critically engage with the content based on what you know from previous linguistics classes, previous discussions or readings in this class, and/or your own experience as a language user. You can choose to talk about one or all of the assigned readings for each class. There is no strict length requirement, although you should expect to submit at least a paragraph or two to have a complete answer. Overall, your discussion post should strive to make it clear to me that you have read and thought about the assigned text(s).

- (c) **Paper presentation.** As part of your participation grade, you will be expected to present one assigned reading to the class. Please let me know of your selection at least 24 hours in advance of your presentation.

**Website:** Slides and handouts from lecture, readings, assignments, and the rest of our materials will be posted on Canvas. Discussion posts should be posted to Canvas. Please contact me if you don’t have access to the website.

## Final papers

In addition to discussion posts, this course will have a final paper, in which you will be asked to independently research and write about a case study of your choice in sociolinguistic typology. You can focus on a particular linguistic feature (or set of features) that has taken on social meaning in a language with which you are familiar. Or you can choose to focus on a particular social setting and analyze how it may have contributed to the structure of and/or use of a particular language. This paper should be more than a literature review; as with your Canvas posts, you should introduce novel discussion of your sources. Papers should be 10-15 pages in length (single-spaced). You will be asked to confer with me about your chosen topic and submit a prospectus (which should include a partial bibliography) at the end of Week 7.

## Grading

Attendance and participation:	20%
Discussion posts:	35%
Final prospectus:	10%
Final paper:	35%

## Academic Honesty

By now you are all familiar with the College's strict policies regarding plagiarism. Since this is a discussion-based class, one of our goals is to inform one another's perspectives on these topics; as such, a reasonable amount of overlap in your assignments is expected. However, obvious instances of academic malpractice will not be tolerated and will be penalized accordingly.

## Tentative schedule

We will start out by following this schedule; however, things may shuffle around or be cut, depending on your interests and timing.

### Part I: Linguistic features as social objects

#### Week 1

*Topics:* Introduction to linguistic typology; language universals; phonological typology

*Readings:* Daniel 2010; Maddieson 2010; van der Hulst 2017

#### Week 2

*Topics:* Linguistic typology continued; morphological and syntactic typology

*Readings:* Payne 2017; Bickel and Nichols 2007

#### Week 3

*Topics:* Markedness; socially-anchored language; social deixis

*Readings:* Bybee 2010; Agha 2007 (ch. 6, Registers of person deixis); Agha 2007 (ch. 7, Honorific registers); Storch 2017

#### Week 4

*Topics:* Enregisterment; linguistic features as social objects; language ideology shaping linguistic outcomes

*Readings:* Johnstone 2016; Johnstone et al. 2006; Babel 2011 (*Optional: Pratt and D'Onofrio 2017; Philips 2007; Agha 2008*)

#### Week 5

*Topics:* Multilingualism and multidialectism as a fundamentally social phenomenon; code-mixing and borrowing

*Readings:* Poplack et al. 1988; Wei 2000; Blom and Gumperz 2000 (*Optional: Mufwene 2001 (ch. 1, Introduction); Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2019; Zenner et al. 2019*)

## Part II: Linguistic features as social results

### Week 6

*Topics:* Multilingual societies; results of language contact (types of contact-induced change; types of mixed languages; language endangerment and shift)

*Readings:* Thomason 2001; Bakker 2017; Daval-Markussen and Bakker 2017; Thomason 2015 (ch. 3, Social processes and linguistic effects)

### Week 7

*Topics:* Society and linguistic features; Sapir-Whorf and linguistic relativity; research and academic writing in linguistics

*Readings:* Whorf 1956; Kay and Kempton 1984

**\*\*Final paper prospectus due Friday at 11pm\*\***

### Week 8

*Topics:* Society and linguistic features continued; social structure and linguistic structure; sign language typology

*Readings:* Trudgill 2011 (Prologue); Trudgill 2011 (ch. 1, Sociolinguistic typology and the speed of change); Trudgill 2011 (ch. 5, Contact and Isolation in Phonology)

### Week 9

*Topics:* Linguistic complexity, mature language phenomena; polysynthesis

*Readings:* Trudgill 2011 (ch. 2, Complexification, Simplification); Trudgill 2011 (ch. 6, Mature Phenomena and Societies of Intimates); Trudgill 2017

**\*\*Final papers due during Finals Week\*\***

## References

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## **Administrative Policies**

### **Land Acknowledgment**

As we study the wealth of diversity in languages of the world and the different societies that shaped this diversity, it is important that we acknowledge the ways that indigenous peoples and their languages have often been disproportionately negatively affected by social disruption. Our course meets on the ancestral lands of the Council of the Three Fires (*Niswi-mishkodewinan*), a confederacy including the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa peoples. Other indigenous groups of Illinois include the Miami, Menominee, Sac, Fox, Ho-Chunk, Kickapoo, and Illinois Nations.

### **Accommodations**

I am committed to creating an inclusive and accessible classroom environment for all students, including those with visible and non-visible disabilities. Please write to me and we will agree on reasonable accommodations so that your educational needs can be met appropriately. There is no need to tell me of the reason for your accommodation request unless you feel it would be helpful. I will not require supporting materials from the Office of Student Disability Services unless significant changes to the course requirements are necessary.

### **COVID-related Policies**

We will meet in-person as often as possible; however, we must all be prepared to move to an online meeting format depending on the status of the virus in Chicago and the university's guidelines. I recognize that the pandemic has placed an outsize burden on all of us and will approve extensions and accommodations as needed. However, I ask that you communicate with me *in advance* of deadlines so that we can make arrangements ahead of time.

There will not be a standing Zoom meeting for this course except on scheduled online days (e.g., First Week classes). My experience (as well as that of other instructors) has cast serious doubt on the quality of hybrid in-person/online classrooms, so I expect you to make an effort to attend class in-person unless you have a compelling reason that you cannot (e.g.,

potential COVID exposure). In the event that you think you may have been exposed to COVID or have COVID symptoms, please inform me and the appropriate university officials (C19HealthReport@uchicago.edu).

## **Use of Technology in the Classroom**

As in any discussion-based class, it is necessary to provide your classmates with your full and undivided attention. For this reason, laptops, tablets, and other devices should only be used to view assigned readings, although it is preferable if you bring printed copies with you to minimize unintended distractions. Please only use your devices to assist in your class participation. (Trust me, we can tell when you're not paying attention. We know what it's like to be distracted by TikTok videos throughout the day, even if we're old enough to remember being "poked" on Facebook.) If this policy gets in the way of your requested accommodations or would otherwise impede your ability to fully participate, please get in touch with me.