

Sociology of Language

Last updated 10 April 2021

LING 380 / SOC 427

College of Staten Island, CUNY

Spring 2021

Instructor: Joseph Pentangelo
joseph.pentangelo@gmail.com

* Please include "LING 380" in the subject line of any emails to me.

Course Description:

This course explores the intersection of society and language. When a person speaks, a large amount of information about their gender, ethnicity, class, location, and even political affiliation is often expressed. Students will learn about key topics in sociolinguistics, including language variation, language change, attitudes towards language, register, and code switching. Particular attention will be paid to sociolinguistic issues in New York City. The sorts of questions that will be explored include: What is conveyed by the stereotypical New York accent, and why do so many people actively try to lose theirs? (And why does it seem to come back when around family?) Why do some New Yorkers pronounce "mozzarella," "ricotta," and "capicola" in a noteworthy way, and why are they often made fun of for it? Where did "ain't," "finna," and "brang" come from, and why do some people wrongly insist that they're "not real words"?

Class Meeting

Class meets on Fridays from 2:30 to 6:10pm over Zoom.

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5545397081?pwd=NVZjd3hKQzhWcXJlZU5BbnNCaVhpUT09>

Meeting ID: 554 539 7081

Passcode: linguist

Office Hours

Office hours are held on Tuesdays from 12 noon through 2:00pm using the same Zoom link as we use for class. Please email me ahead of time to set up an appointment.

Website

The course website hosts readings, as well as up-to-date links to the syllabus, Zoom meeting room, quizzes, exams, and supplementary materials. It is suggested that you bookmark this site. Some pages are password-protected. The password is “linguist” (without the quotation marks).

URL: <https://soclang2021.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/>

Course Requirements

Required readings:

The textbook for this course is *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (5th edition) by Ronald Wardhaugh. Readings from this book may be supplemented by articles and other materials. All readings, including the textbook, are (or will be) available on our course website.

Grade breakdown:

- Quizzes (20%)
- Exams (40%)
- Participation & Attendance (40%)

Grade key:

A	93%+
A-	90–92%
B+	87–89%
B	83–86%
B-	80–82%
C+	77–79%
C	70–76%
D	60–69%
F	<60%

Quizzes:

You will be assigned four quizzes with questions relevant to the preceding few weeks’ readings and class discussions. Each quiz is worth 5% of your overall grade. Quizzes will be emailed to you and posted on the course website. Quizzes will be submitted by the time and date indicated in the calendar below.

Exams:

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final, each worth 20% of your overall grade. Note that the final is not cumulative; it will only cover materials from after the midterm.

Participation:

You are expected to attend class regularly and participate in class discussions. In each class, we will work through discussion questions, some pulled from the readings. Participation makes up 40% of your overall grade.

Attendance:

You are expected to attend each class meeting. If you know that you will need to miss a class (due to illness, a family emergency, etc.), please let me know ahead of time or as soon as possible so that you will be granted an excused absence. In addition, you are permitted up to two unexcused absences without being penalized; after your second unexcused absence, you will lose 5 points per subsequent unexcused absence. In the case of any absence, excused or otherwise, you will be responsible for doing any readings you missed.

Class Policies

Plagiarism:

CSI's 2020–2021 undergraduate catalogue has this to say on plagiarism:

“Integrity is fundamental to the academic enterprise. It is violated by such acts as borrowing or purchasing assignments (including but not limited to term papers, essays, and reports) and other written assignments, using concealed notes or crib sheets during examinations, copying the work of others and submitting it as one’s own, and misappropriating the knowledge of others. The sources from which one derives one’s ideas, statements, terms, and data, including Internet sources, must be fully and specifically acknowledged in the appropriate form; failure to do so, intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes plagiarism.

Violations of academic integrity may result in a lower grade or failure in a course and in disciplinary actions with penalties such as suspension or dismissal from the College. For more information please visit the [CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity.](#)”

Statement on accommodations for students with disabilities:

Qualified students with disabilities will be provided reasonable academic accommodations if determined eligible by the Center for Student Accessibility. Prior to granting disability

accommodations in this course, the instructor must receive written verification of the student's eligibility from the Center for Student Accessibility. It is the student's responsibility to initiate contact with the Center for Student Accessibility and to follow the established procedures for having the accommodation notice sent to the instructor. More information is available on the [Center's webpage](#).

Course Calendar

The below calendar includes information on topics we'll cover, along with the dates of quizzes and exams. Most assignments and readings are not on the below calendar, but will be given weekly in class, emailed to you, and posted on the website before they are due.

The following is subject to change. Any changes will be emailed out to the class along with an updated syllabus.

1	29 January	Course introduction.
2	5 February	Introduction to sociolinguistics. Read Wardhaugh, chapter 1, before class. (Don't worry about the discussion questions – we'll do some of those in class.) Quiz 1 assigned.
No class on 12 February (Lunar New Year)		
3	19 February	Languages, dialects, and varieties. Quiz 1 due.
4	26 February	Regional dialects. Quiz 2 assigned.
5	5 March	Social dialects, styles, registers, and beliefs. Quiz 2 due.
6	12 March	Codes & code-switching.
7	19 March	Review of topics covered so far. Midterm assigned.
8	26 March	Speech communities. Midterm due.
No class on 2 April (Good Friday)		
9	9 April	Regional variation.
10	16 April	Social variation I. Quiz 3 assigned.
11	23 April	Social variation II. Quiz 3 due.
12	30 April	Language change I. Quiz 4 assigned.
13	7 May	Language change II. Quiz 4 due.
14	14 May	Review. Final exam assigned.
	21 May	No class, but final exam due.