

**LING-UA 102: Research Seminar**  
**Language Variation and Change Over the Lifespan**  
Course Information and Policies

### 1. Course & instructor logistics

**Time & place** Wed. 9:30am–12:15pm, 10 Washington Pl., Rm. 104

- We'll take a ~15-minute break halfway through.
- Generally, the first half of the allotted time will be used to discuss readings, and the second half will be used for hands-on practical research skills.

**Professor** Dr. Laurel MacKenzie (laurel.mackenzie@nyu.edu)

**Office** 10 Washington Pl., Rm. 305

**Office hour** Wed. 2:00–3:00pm and by appointment via <https://calendly.com/laurel-mackenzie>

- **Terms of address:** You're welcome to call me by my first name (*Laurel*) or "Professor MacKenzie." I use *she/her* pronouns.
- **Email:** I respond to student emails twice a day, during business hours, Monday through Friday.
- **Office hour:** Come to my office hour! You don't need to ask permission: I set that time aside just for members of this class. And office hours aren't only for questions about the homework or your grade! Drop by my office hour just to say hi or chat about language and linguistics. I love hearing from you.
- **Appointments:** If you can't make my office hour, or I need to cancel it, book an appointment to see me at a different time using my Calendly link above. I don't book appointments over email.

### 2. Course description and goals

In this seminar, we'll study the acquisition and development of sociolinguistic variation over the lifespan. Questions we'll investigate include: When and how do children pick up on the socially-meaningful variation used by the adults in their community? What is the role of adolescents in advancing language change? Can we change the way we speak in middle age and beyond? What happens when speakers of different dialects come into contact with one another? Students will carry out their own longitudinal study of a sociolinguistic variable of interest in the speech of a subject for whom longitudinal recordings are freely available.

This course is designed to equip you with the skills needed to carry out sociolinguistic research. Through successfully completing this course, you will:

- gain exposure to cutting-edge research and debates in sociolinguistics.
- develop skills in critically reading and writing about academic literature.
- learn how to develop and test sociolinguistic hypotheses.
- gain currency with state-of-the-art technological tools for linguistic data collection and analysis.
- learn how to structure and present a rigorous linguistic argument supported with empirical data.

### 3. Course format

This is a seminar class, in which we will learn from each other through discussion of the papers we read and the issues they raise. Lecturing will be kept to a minimum.

- For this reason, participation in in-class discussion is essential. You'll be expected to ask, and answer, questions in class. If you are shy, come to office hours to strategize about how you can participate in class in a way that you're comfortable with. If you are the opposite of shy, please be mindful of your fellow students: if you've already spoken, wait a minute to give someone else a turn.
- You'll be expected to complete the reading(s) associated with each class **before** the associated class. You'll also be expected to have the readings in some format (digital is fine) with you during class.
- There will typically be a short homework assignment due each week, often associated with that week's reading. Homework assignments will be communicated at the end of class and due via email to Laurel before the next class begins. You'll also discuss the results of your assignments in class. This means you need to bring the results of your assignments (digital is fine) to each class with you.
- All homework assignments will take a few hours, and, in some cases, will require research that takes a few days. Allow yourself plenty of time to work on these assignments!

This class also has a practical research component, in which you will learn sociolinguistic research skills through hands-on exercises, many of which we will do in class, culminating in your final paper.

- Ideally, you'll have a laptop you can bring to class for this. If this is unworkable for you, I'm happy to help you come up with an alternative, such as borrowing a Linguistics Department laptop.

Course materials (PDF readings, homework assignments, class plans) will be kept in a Google Drive folder which will be shared with enrolled students at the beginning of the semester.

### 4. Assignments & grades

Your grade for this course will be based on a combination of factors. The relative weight assigned in course evaluation is (approximately) as follows:

Class participation & attendance	20%
Homework assignments	40%
Presentation	10%
Final paper, including 3 progress reports	30%

Instructions and deadlines for the presentation and final paper are available in the class Google Drive folder.

## **5. Course policies**

### **5.1. Deadlines & extensions**

Assignments are due before class begins unless otherwise indicated. Wednesday morning submission is fine, but I really recommend getting your work in the night before class. Sleep is important to your health and mental well-being, and this class probably isn't worth staying up all night for.

If you're going to be late submitting an assignment, set up an in-person meeting with me to work out a plan for completion. Some deadlines can't be extended because we'll discuss the answers to the assignment in class, so I'll either give you a make-up assignment, or calculate your grade without that assignment.

Please plan ahead, comparing the syllabi for your courses now, to see when you have conflicting deadlines or difficult weeks. If things look impossible, please talk to me with plenty of advance notice.

The very last day on which work for this course will be accepted is Friday, May 15. No extensions that go past this date will be granted in any circumstances.

### **5.2. Incompletes**

A grade of Incomplete will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances, and never to a student who has completed less than 50% of the coursework by semester's end. A grade of Incomplete requires documentation. Medical documentation must be submitted through the Moses Center; it cannot be submitted directly to the professor.

### **5.3. Collaboration**

You are welcome to discuss the homework assignments with other students, but you must each write up your submissions separately and in your own words. Collaboration on the final paper is not allowed.

### **5.4. Academic honesty**

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated, and may result in a zero on an assignment. If you use any resource as you prepare your homework assignments or project, you must provide a scholarly citation for the resource.

### **5.5. Academic accommodations for students with disabilities**

Please don't hesitate to talk to Prof. MacKenzie if there's anything I can do differently to better accommodate your learning needs.

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, or learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities over the phone at 212-998-4980, in person at 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, or online at [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd).

## 6. How to succeed in this (or any!) course

- Attend all classes.
- Do the reading **before** class. Read actively, by taking notes and asking questions.
- Take good notes and pay attention during class.
- As soon as you get a chance after each class, revisit and organize your notes from class, looking back over any handouts and the reading to solidify your understanding.
- Make note of where you have questions about class content or readings.
- Bring your questions to class or to office hours.
- Start your assignments as soon as you get them.
- Seek help on your assignments well before they are due.

## 7. Want to learn more?

- Come to Prof. MacKenzie's office hour!
- Check out the following podcasts about (socio)linguistics:
  - Lingthusiasm
  - The Vocal Fries
  - NPR's Code Switch
- Check out news and events from NYU's Linguistics Department!

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Syllabus

This is a tentative syllabus. We may speed up, slow down, or move/change things as needed.

Homework assignments will be communicated in class. They're also in the Homework Assignments folder on GDrive. Expect one per week, in addition to ongoing work on your final project.

Wk. 1	W 1/29	Introduction and overview. Reading for 2/5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ch. 1 of Tagliamonte, Sali A. 2012. <i>Variationist Sociolinguistics: Change, Observation, Interpretation</i>. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.</li></ul>
Wk. 2	W 2/5	Studying language variation and change. Working with sociolinguistic data. Reading for 2/12: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ch. 2 of Tagliamonte 2012. Pay close attention to the section on Age (pg. 43–55).</li></ul>
Wk. 3	W 2/12	Social patterning of language variation and change. Reading a scientific article. Reading for 2/19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Excerpts from Ch. 1 of Gries, Stefan Th. 2013. <i>Statistics for Linguistics with R: A Practical Introduction</i>. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.</li><li>Trudgill, Peter. 1983. Acts of conflicting identity: The sociolinguistics of British pop-song pronunciation. In <i>On Dialect</i>, ed. Peter Trudgill, 141–160. New York University Press.</li></ul>
Wk. 4	W 2/19	Developing a linguistic hypothesis. Statistical significance testing. Reading for 2/26: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sankoff, Gillian. 2004. Adolescents, young adults and the critical period: Two case studies from 'Seven Up'. In <i>Sociolinguistic Variation: Critical Reflections</i>, ed. Carmen Fought, 121–139. New York: Oxford University Press.</li><li>Tagliamonte, Sali A., and Sonja Molfenter. 2007. How'd you get that accent?: Acquiring a second dialect of the same language. <i>Language in Society</i> 36:649–675.</li></ul>
Wk. 5	W 2/26	Social & geographical mobility. Reading for 3/4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Nardy, Aurélie, Jean-Pierre Chevrot, and Stéphanie Barbu. 2014. Sociolinguistic convergence and social interactions within a group of preschoolers: A longitudinal study. <i>Language Variation and Change</i> 26:273–301.</li></ul>

Wk. 6 W 3/4 Forming the peer group in childhood. Working with audio data.  
Reading for 3/11:

- Van Hofwegen, Janneke, and Walt Wolfram. 2010. Coming of age in African American English: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14:427–455.

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Wk. 7 W 3/11 Standardization in the school-age years. Working with audio data, continued.  
Reading for 3/25:

- Eckert, Penelope. 2004. Adolescent language. In *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Edward Finegan and John R. Rickford, 360–375. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

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 SPRING BREAK!

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Wk. 8 W 3/25 Language in adolescence. Data presentation and analysis.  
Reading for 4/1:

- Rickford, John, and Mackenzie Price. 2013. Girlz II women: Age-grading, language change and stylistic variation. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17:143–179.

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Wk. 9 W 4/1 Standardization in young adulthood. Data presentation and analysis, continued.  
Reading for 4/8:

- Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena. 2005. Language change in adulthood. *European Journal of English Studies* 9:37–51.
- Harrington, Jonathan, Sallyanne Palethorpe, and Catherine I. Watson. 2000. Does the Queen speak the Queen’s English? *Nature* 408:927–928.
- Excerpt from Fabricius, Anne H. 2007. Variation and change in the TRAP and STRUT vowels of RP: A real time comparison of five acoustic data sets. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 37:293–320.

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Wk. 10 W 4/8 Later-life participation in community change.  
Reading for 4/15:

- Mechler, Johanna, and Isabelle Buchstaller. 2019. [In]stability in the use of a stable variable. *Linguistics Vanguard* 5.

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Wk. 11 W 4/15 Age-grading in later life. Guided project work session.  
Reading for 4/22:

- MacKenzie, Laurel. 2017. Frequency effects over the lifespan: A case study of Attenborough’s r’s. *Linguistics Vanguard* 3.

Wk. 12	W 4/22	Other types of later-life change. Guided project work session. Reading for 4/29: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sonderegger, Morgan, Max Bane, and Peter Graff. 2017. The medium-term dynamics of accents on reality television. <i>Language</i> 93:598–640.</li></ul>
Wk. 13	W 4/29	The role of accommodation in later-life change. Guided project work session. No reading for 5/6.
Wk. 14	W 5/6	Wrap-up & final presentations.
Exam period	W 5/13	Final paper due.