

LING-UA-57: English Dialects
Course Information

1. Course logistics

Lecture time Tue/Thu 3:30–4:45pm
Location 10 Washington Pl., Rm. 104

Recitation time Mon 12:30–1:45pm
Location Fairchild 129

Instructor Dr. Laurel MacKenzie
Contact laurel.mackenzie@nyu.edu (please allow 48 hours for a reply)
Office 10 Washington Pl., Rm. 305
Office hour Wed 3:30–4:30pm

TA Mary Robinson
Contact mkr361@nyu.edu
Office 10 Washington Pl., Rm. 308
Office hour Thu 5–6pm

2. Required text

Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling. 2015. *American English: Dialects and Variation*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, third edition. (W&S) Available electronically through BobCat.

Supplementary readings will be available on NYU Classes. You should do all the readings **before** the associated lecture.

3. Overview

What's a dialect, and who speaks one? Why is it that nearby places can have such different ways of speaking? When and how did British and American English diverge? This course examines these and other questions about regional dialects of English in the United States and abroad. Dialect variation will be studied on many linguistic levels, from word choice to the pronunciation of vowels and consonants to the construction of sentences. Topics include the fundamentals of dialectology, the historical development of regional dialects, mechanisms of language change, and social evaluation of dialects. Connections will be made to techniques of quantitative data analysis and practical applications of dialectology.

Through successfully completing this course, you will:

- be familiar with the major dialect regions of the United States, the linguistic features that distinguish them, and their historical sources.
- be familiar with the characteristics, history, and social status of dialects of English as spoken abroad.
- understand the theory and methods underlying the field of dialectology.
- collect, analyze, and write about dialect data.
- be able to discuss matters of dialectal variation with scientific rigor and cultural sensitivity.

4. Assignments & grades

4.1. Class participation & attendance: 10%

Class participation will be assessed on the basis of your lecture and recitation attendance records and your level and quality of participation in class discussions and exercises. Don't be afraid to speak up 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 know that you will miss a class due to a religious holiday or an athletic event, please let one of us know in the first two weeks of the semester.

4.2. Homework assignments: 60%

There will be six homework assignments, each worth 10%. Assignments will be posted on NYU Classes before lecture on Tuesdays and with one exception (HW 6), due before recitation the following Monday.

4.3. Essay: 20%

For your final paper, you will analyze the portrayal of an English dialect in a piece of popular media. This analysis is expected to include a linguistically-informed description of the dialect and the portrayal, a critical analysis of the accuracy of the portrayal, and a discussion of its merits and demerits as a representation of the dialect and its speakers. Expected length: 5–6 pages. Due date: **Monday, April 24**.

You will workshop your paper ideas in recitation on **March 6**, so have some idea of what you want to do by then. A short written proposal (1 page) will be due on **Monday, March 20**.

4.4. Class presentation based on essay: 10%

You will deliver a 10-minute presentation based on your essay in either the last lecture (**Thursday, May 4**) or the last recitation (**Monday, May 8**).

5. Course policies

5.1. Assignments

- Assignments are due at 12:30pm. Due dates will always be on Mondays, so this means assignments are due when recitation starts. Assignments will be discussed in recitation, so **no extensions can be given**. If a documented emergency keeps you from finishing your assignment on time, talk to Prof. MacKenzie.
- Assignments must be typed and submitted electronically through NYU Classes. PDF format is ideal.
- You are welcome to discuss the homework assignments with other students, but **you must each write up your submissions separately in your own words**.

5.2. Course materials and technology

- You may take notes on your laptop during lectures, but please **sit on the perimeter of the room**, and avoid multitasking out of consideration for your classmates' concentration. (And note that research shows you learn better when you take notes by hand!: <http://goo.gl/5DeXtF>)
- All materials used in this course are copyrighted, **including lecture slides and assignments**. Reproducing class materials, or uploading them to websites, is copyright infringement.

6. Syllabus

Note: This syllabus is subject to change according to Prof. MacKenzie's discretion. The version on NYU Classes will be kept up to date. "TBD" readings will be filled in as they approach.

Week 1

1/24 Introduction & overview.

HW 1 (Linguistic autobiography) assigned.

1/26 Foundational concepts in the study of dialectology: language, dialect, accent, variety; standard, non-standard; descriptivism, prescriptivism.

Reading: W&S ch. 1 (p. 1–26)

Week 2

1/30 Recitation: Exploring dialect data and notions of standard language.

HW 1 (Linguistic autobiography) due.

1/31 Sociohistorical sources of regional dialects.

Reading: W&S ch. 2 up until §2.2.1 (p. 27–42)

HW 2 (Lexicography of slang) assigned.

2/2 Levels of dialect: lexical differences, slang.

Reading: W&S §2.2.5 (p. 55–57), §3.1–3.2 (p. 59–68)

Week 3

2/6 Recitation: Exploring lexical innovations and slang. Word of the Year.

HW 2 (Lexicography of slang) due.

2/7 Levels of dialect: phonological differences.

Reading – students with no background in linguistics: Bigham, 2014 'How many vowels are there in English?' (<http://goo.gl/LuiSxm>), 'The sounds of American English' (<http://goo.gl/qtUaoj> – explore the sounds, symbols, & videos)

Reading – all students: W&S §2.2.4 (p. 50–55), §3.3 (p. 68–79)

HW 3 (Sounds & symbols) assigned.

2/9 Levels of dialect: grammatical differences.

Reading: W&S §2.2.1–2.2.3 (p. 42–50), §3.4 (p. 79–86)

Week 4

2/13 Recitation: Analyzing phonological & grammatical dialect data.

HW 3 (Sounds & symbols) due.

2/14 The source of American English.

Reading: W&S, ch. 4 (p. 97–124)

No HW assigned.

2/16 Change and stability in dialects: convergence and divergence; dialect leveling and diffusion; maintenance of dialect distinctions.

Reading: W&S, §5.4 (p. 143–148)

Week 5

- 2/20 **No recitation – Presidents’ Day Holiday**
- 2/21 Methods in dialectology: traditional, perceptual, computational.
Reading: W&S, §5.1–5.3 (p. 125–143), §5.5 (p. 148–153)
HW 4 (Building a dialect questionnaire) assigned.
- 2/23 Regional dialects of American English: The South and Appalachia.
Reading: TBD

Week 6

- 2/27 Recitation: Building our dialect questionnaire. Analyzing Southern dialect data.
HW 4 (Building a dialect questionnaire) due.
- 2/28 Regional dialects of American English: The North and New England.
Reading: TBD
HW 5 (The North & the South) assigned.
- 3/2 Mergers in American English.
Reading: TBD

Week 7

- 3/6 Recitation: Workshopping essay ideas. Analyzing Northern & Southern dialect data.
HW 5 (The North & the South) due.
- 3/7 Regional dialects of American English: The West and Canada.
Reading: TBD
HW: Write your 1-page essay proposal. Post our dialect questionnaire on social media.
- 3/9 Regional dialects of American English: The Midland.
Reading: TBD

Spring Break – no class!

Week 8

- 3/20 Recitation: Mapping dialect data. **Bring a laptop!**
Essay proposal due.
- 3/21 Regional dialects of American English: Philadelphia.
Reading: TBD
Homework 6 (Analyzing dialect survey data) assigned. You’ll have an extra week on this assignment.
- 3/23 Regional dialects of American English: New York City.
Reading: TBD

Week 9

3/27 Recitation: Analyzing Philadelphia and New York City dialect data.

3/28 Ethnic dialects of American English.
Reading: W&S ch. 7 (p. 269–310)
No new HW. Keep working on HW 6.

3/30 African American English.
Reading: W&S ch. 8 (p. 217–244)

Week 10

4/3 Recitation: Analyzing African American English dialect data. Language, ethnicity, and discrimination.
Homework 6 (Analyzing dialect survey data) due.

4/4 Regional dialects of British English, part 1.
Reading: TBD
No new HW. Start working on your essay, if you haven't already.

4/6 Dialect survey results. Regional dialects of British English, part 1.
Reading: TBD

Week 11

4/10 Recitation: Analyzing British English dialect data.

4/11 Australian and New Zealand English.
Reading: TBD
No new HW. Keep working on your essay.

4/13 Global Englishes.
Reading: TBD

Week 12

4/17 Recitation: Analyzing Australian & New Zealand English dialect data.

4/18 Guest lecture.
No reading.
No new HW. Finish your essay.

4/20 Guest lecture.
No reading.

Week 13

4/24 Recitation: Analyzing global English dialect data.
Essay due.

4/25 Applied dialectology.
Reading: W&S ch. 11 (p. 311–336)

4/27 Dialect awareness.
Reading: W&S ch. 12 (p. 337–366)

Week 14

5/1 Recitation: Automatic speech recognition and regional dialects. **Bring a laptop!**

5/2 Discussion, conclusions, reflections.

5/4 **Class presentations.**

Week 15

5/8 Recitation: **Class presentations.**