LING-GA 2530 Linguistic Variation

Syllabus

1. Logistics

Time & place T 12:30–3:15p, 10 Washington Pl. Rm. 104

Instructor Laurel MacKenzie (laurel.mackenzie@nyu.edu)
Office hours By appointment via https://calendly.com/laurel-mackenzie

2. Course description and goals

This course is an intensive graduate-level introduction to the quantitative study of variation in language. The course has two goals:

1. Students will gain an understanding of some of the fundamental questions in variationist sociolinguistics, concerning how variation in language is structured and how it is represented formally.
2. Students will gain currency in methods for the collection and analysis of variationist sociolinguistic data. This comprises quantitative and statistical techniques and the processing of corpus data.

In class, we will learn by reading and by doing. We will read and discuss classic and recent papers in the field addressing the first point above. And we'll work on a group project to collect and analyze data on the structure of a particular linguistic variable decided on by the class. Ideally, this will culminate in a co-written abstract to be submitted to a conference such as NWAV 52 (to be held in Miami, Nov. 7–9).

This course will assume that you have already had a basic introduction to doing statistics in R, such as that offered by LING-GA 2945 Statistical Analysis in Linguistics, as well as a basic familiarity with phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax.

3. Materials

Everything you will need for the course will be linked from this syllabus document. I recommend that you make a shortcut to this document on your own Google Drive by doing File > Add shortcut to Drive. Then organize it somewhere where you can easily find it each time we meet.

Access to course materials is restricted to NYU Google accounts. If you're told that you "do not have permission" to access some course material, you are likely logged in through a personal Google account. Switch to your NYU account and try again.

4. Requirements

- **Readings, annotations, and participation:** All participants are expected to do the assigned reading (before class) and to participate in discussion of the material in class. You are also requested to annotate the readings with questions/comments/complaints as you read them: at least two annotations per class session, ideally with those annotations in at least two different readings (where applicable).

We will attempt to use Adobe's Share PDF feature for commenting on readings. On a desktop, it doesn't require any special software or logging in (though please identify yourself when you comment). On a mobile device, you'll need the (free) Adobe Acrobat app, and you'll need to log in with your NYU/Google account to comment. **Please access the readings through the syllabus links in this document** so that you access the commenting interface.

Readings in the first half of the course will be journal articles and handbook chapters. Readings in the second half of the course will come from Bodo Winter's (2020) textbook *Statistics for Linguists: An Introduction using R*. Keep Dan Villarreal's errata/notes page handy as you read Winter's text.

- **Assignments:** Each week will have an associated assignment. As the semester progresses, these will involve doing work on the group project. Participants are expected to do the assignments.
- **Group project-related write-up:** At the end of the semester, participants will be expected to write up something related to the group project. Depending on how far along the project is, this might be an abstract for conference submission, or it might be a project proposal to look at something in or related to the data.

Syllabus

(subject to change based on how things go)

Reading is to be done before class; homework after class.

Week	**Topics**	**Reading**
1 (1/23)	Foundational issues, variationist terminology	Labov 2006
2 (1/30)	Variationist methods, the linguistic variable, the envelope of variation	Wolfram 1993 Rickford et al. 1991 Brook 2018
3 (2/6)	Formalizing variation: phonetics & phonology	Fruehwald 2022 Cedergren & Sankoff 1974 (fine to skim §4–8) Foulkes & Docherty 2006 (fine to skim §2–3)
4 (2/13)	Formalizing variation: morphosyntax	Adger, Jamieson, & Smith 2020 Kroch 1994 §1–3.3 and 6 Embick 2008
5 (2/20)	**No class!** (Laurel out of town)	
6 (2/27)	Conditioning of variation, pt. 1	Tamminga, MacKenzie, & Embick 2016 Purse, Fruehwald, & Tamminga 2022
7 (3/5)	Conditioning of variation, pt. 2	Bender 2005 MacKenzie 2019

Week	Topics	Reading
8 (3/12)	Case studies connecting quantitative data & grammatical representation of variation	MacKenzie 2020 MacKenzie & Tamminga 2021
3/19	**Spring break! No class!**	
9 (3/26)	R code hygiene, R markdown, summarizing & plotting categorical dependent variables	(see Wk. 8 notes)
10 (4/2)	Simple linear regression with one continuous predictor	Winter ch. 4 & 5
11 (4/9)	Multiple linear regression with continuous & categorical predictors	Winter ch. 6, 7, & 11.3–11.4
12 (4/16)	Logistic regression	Winter ch. 12
13 (4/23)	Interactions	Winter ch. 8
14 (4/30)	Random effects, model selection	Winter ch. 14–16

References

Adger, David, E Jamieson, and Jennifer Smith. 2020. Sociolinguistics and minimalist syntax. Ms. submitted to *Cambridge Handbook of Minimalism*. URL https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005605.

Bender, Emily M. 2005. On the boundaries of linguistic competence: Matched-guise experiments as evidence of knowledge of grammar. *Lingua* 115:1579–1598.

Brook, Marisa. 2018. Taking it up a level: Copy-raising and cascaded tiers of morphosyntactic change. *Language Variation and Change* 30:231–260.

Cedergren, Henrietta, and David Sankoff. 1974. Variable rules: Performance as a statistical reflection of competence. *Language* 50:333–355.

Embick, David. 2008. Variation and morphosyntactic theory: Competition fractionated. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2:59–78.

Foulkes, Paul, and Gerard Docherty. 2006. The social life of phonetics and phonology. *Journal of Phonetics* 34:409–438.

Kroch, Anthony. 1994. Morphosyntactic variation. In *Proceedings of the 30th Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society*, 180–201.

Labov, William. 2006. Quantitative analysis of linguistic variation. In *Sociolinguistics: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*, ed. Ulrich Ammon, Norbert Dittmar, Klaus J. Mattheier, and Peter Trudgill, 6–21. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

MacKenzie, Laurel. 2019. Perturbing the community grammar: Individual differences and community-level constraints on sociolinguistic variation. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 4:28.

MacKenzie, Laurel. 2020. Comparing constraints on contraction using Bayesian regression modeling. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence: Language and Computation* 3:58.

MacKenzie, Laurel, and Meredith Tamminga. 2021. New and old puzzles in the morphological conditioning of coronal stop deletion. *Language Variation and Change* 33:217–244.

Purse, Ruaridh, Josef Fruehwald, and Meredith Tamminga. 2022. Frequency and morphological complexity in variation. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 7:1–34.

Rickford, John R., Arnetha Ball, Renée Blake, Raina Jackson, and Nomi Martin. 1991. Rappin on the copula coffin: Theoretical and methodological issues in the analysis of copula variation in African-American Vernacular English. *Language Variation and Change* 3:103–132.

Tamminga, Meredith, Laurel MacKenzie, and David Embick. 2016. The dynamics of variation in individuals. *Linguistic Variation* 16:300–336.

Wolfram, Walt. 1993. Identifying and interpreting variables. In *American Dialect Research*, ed. Dennis R. Preston, 193–221. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.