

LING 1267 Aspects of Sociolinguistics

Class time: TTh 11am–12:15pm

Class location: Benedum Hall G27

Instructor: [REDACTED], PhD ([REDACTED]/[REDACTED]). Feel free to address me as [REDACTED], *Dr.* [REDACTED], *Dr.* [REDACTED], *Professor* [REDACTED], or whatever comes most naturally to you.

Office hours: TTh 3:30–4:30pm. [REDACTED]’s office (CL [REDACTED]). No appointment necessary.

Textbooks:

- *What is sociolinguistics?* (2nd edition), Gerard Van Herk, 2017, Wiley (available [online thru Pitt Library](#))
- *English with an accent* (3rd edition, **not** the 1st or 2nd), Rusty Barrett, Jennifer Cramer, & Kevin McGowan, 2023, Routledge (available at University Store)

Prerequisite: A first-year composition course (e.g., ENGCMP 0200)

Note: This course counts as a writing-intensive (W) course for Dietrich School general education requirements (<https://www.asundergrad.pitt.edu/academic-experience/general-education-requirements>).

Overview and course objectives

This course centers on the relationship between language and society—how social relationships, social practices, and social structures affect language use, language perception, and language differences, and vice versa. This relationship has numerous manifestations and is studied by different scholars using diverse theoretical and analytic frameworks (only a subset of which we will encounter in this course).

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Describe multiple dimensions of the relationship between language and society
2. Explain how the relationship between language and society impacts everyday life
3. Recognize the means by which language is used as a tool for perpetuating unequal power relations in society
4. Engage in scholarly discourse via written communication

Assignments and grading

Your course grade will be based on the assignments described below. Click the name of each assignment for more details.

- **Discussion board engagement (25%):** These out-of-class assignments will give you an opportunity to engage with the course readings. Prior to each class meeting, you will post a brief (100-word) reflection on Canvas Discussions that critically engages with that day's required reading(s). You'll also engage with your classmates' reflections by replying in the thread with brief (50-word) responses. Discussion board posts and responses are graded for thoughtfulness and clarity. You do not need to discuss all 29 required readings; you can potentially get full credit by completing 20 posts and 10 responses, so you may want to plan ahead to decide which days you skip posting (e.g., if you've got a midterm in another class). However, additional posts and responses beyond this minimum can count toward your class participation grade. Posts and responses must be posted by 9am the day of class.
- **Reading Expert (10%):** In this assignment, you will take over about 30 minutes of a class meeting to present and discuss that day's optional reading. Your grade will be based on accuracy, clarity, and discussion questions. Each student will serve as Reading Expert once (working alone or with a partner).
- **Attendance and participation (10%):** Each student's contribution to this course is invaluable to the collective learning process. As such, you will be expected to attend class and participate meaningfully. Given that different learners have different learning styles and different levels of shyness, this class includes a variety of participation opportunities so everyone can feel comfortable participating. Your attendance and participation grade will be assessed for each half of the semester.
- **Sociolinguistic autobiography (15%):** In this writing assignment, you will reflect on your sociolinguistic lived experiences. You will draft an essay between 800–1000 words long, then revise it after peer review and instructor comments. Drafts are due by the start of class Thursday, February 19 (week 6), and revisions Tuesday, March 3 (week 8).
- **Midterm exam (15%):** This in-class exam will assess your understanding of course concepts up to that point. Responses will be graded for correctness. The midterm exam is scheduled for Tuesday, March 17 (week 10).
- **Term paper (25%):** In this writing assignment, you will propose a research project to advance our understanding of some unresolved question in sociolinguistics. You will draft a paper between 1000–1200 words long, then revise it after peer review and instructor comments. Drafts are due by 11:59pm on Friday, April 24 (week 15), and revisions by 11:59pm on Friday, May 1 (finals week). We will have a peer-revision workshop during the final exam slot scheduled for this class (TBD); there is no final exam in this class.

Grading scale

The grading scale is as follows. Note that I do not round grades:

A+ 97–100%	B+ 87–89.99	C+ 77–79.99	D+ 67–69.99	F 0–59.99
A 93–96.99	B 83–86.99	C 73–76.99	D 63–66.99	

A– 90–92.99 B– 80–82.99 C– 70–72.99 D– 60–62.99

Communication

[Email is bad](#). All communication will take place through our class's Slack workspace (signup link). (You'll need to set up a free Slack account if you don't already have one.) Our Slack workspace is your means for asking questions about course content or logistics, it's where we'll post important info about the class, and it's how we'll distribute links and handouts in class. **You are responsible for making sure you are able to receive and read Slack messages in a timely fashion**, by doing at least one of the following:

1. Download the Slack desktop and/or mobile apps
2. Set up [desktop notifications](#) for Slack

Questions about course content or policies should be posted to the #q-and-a channel so the entire class can benefit from your question. For sensitive information (e.g., family emergencies), DM me.

You can post questions to Slack at any time, including during class. (Please note that I generally don't check Slack at night or on weekends.) I will respond to Slack questions ASAP during office hours (see above).

Policies

- **Attendance:** Because much of the course is based around active participation, attendance (and arriving on time) is essential. I am generally pretty understanding when it comes to excusing absences for reasonable circumstances (family emergencies, urgent physical or mental health needs, etc.). If you need to miss class (or arrive late/leave early), please message me on Slack with as much advance notice as possible. For each class, students should bring their laptop (with Slack open) and their textbooks.
- **Late work:** For *only* the sociolinguistic autobiography revisions and term paper first draft, late work will incur a 25% penalty if it is submitted up to 24 hours late, and 50% thereafter. No other assignments will be accepted late.
- **Syllabus adjustments:** I may adjust the syllabus in the course of the semester to better serve this class's learning objectives and/or special opportunities that may arise. I will notify the class of any changes in due time.
- **Academic integrity:** Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the [Academic Integrity Guide](#) for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the [Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial](#). (See also the Generative AI policy below.)

- **Disability resources:** If you have (or think you *may* have) a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. **Many disabilities are invisible, so do not hesitate to contact DRS if you have questions.**
- **Your well-being matters:** College/Graduate school can be an exciting and challenging time for students. Taking time to maintain your well-being and seek appropriate support can help you achieve your goals and lead a fulfilling life. It can be helpful to remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times, and there are many resources available to support your well-being while you are at Pitt. You are encouraged to visit [Thrive@Pitt](#) to learn more about well-being and the many campus resources available to help you thrive.

If you or anyone you know experiences overwhelming academic stress, persistent difficult feelings and/or challenging life events, you are strongly encouraged to seek support. In addition to reaching out to friends and loved ones, consider connecting with a faculty member you trust for assistance connecting to helpful resources.

The [University Counseling Center](#) is also here for you. You can call [412-648-7930](tel:412-648-7930) at any time to connect with a clinician. If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, please call/text 988 or call the University Counseling Center at any time at [412-648-7930](tel:412-648-7930). You can also contact Resolve Crisis Network 24/7 at [888-796-8226](tel:888-796-8226). If the situation is life-threatening, call Pitt Police at [412-624-2121](tel:412-624-2121) or dial 911.

Please take care of yourself and your fellow students.

Generative AI

This class's assignments have been designed to help you develop as a writer. But in the year 2026, what it means to be a writer is changing. As a society, we are all learning about how generative AI writing tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Google Gemini) can be used productively, effectively, and ethically to inform our writing process. As such, in this class, the use of generative AI **is allowed within specific contexts and only if such use is properly acknowledged**. Specifically:

- Generative AI is permitted **only**...
 - for long out-of-class writing assignments (sociolinguistic autobiography and term paper), **and**
 - for generating ideas (e.g., brainstorming), **and**
 - if you include an "Acknowledgement of AI Use" statement

- You may **not**...
 - use generative AI for other assignments or activities (including in-class free-writes)
 - pass off AI-generated text as your own words, just the same as you may not pass off other authors' writing as your own words. (In both cases, substituting one or two words here and there does not make a sentence "your own words".)

Your "Acknowledgement of AI Use" statement needs to:

- Specify which technology was used (ChatGPT, GPT-3, etc.), and on what date
- Include a permalink to the relevant chat (instructions for [ChatGPT](#), [Google Gemini](#)), so instructors can understand how the information was generated
- Explain how the output was used in your work

You do *not* have to provide a formal in-text citation for AI systems, and you only need to include an "Acknowledgement of AI Use" if you used generative AI. This policy applies only to generative AI; older forms of computer-assisted writing (spell-checking, thesaurus lookup, etc.) are completely acceptable.

The use of AI outside of contexts where the instructor specifies its use, or failure to acknowledge any use of AI technologies in your work, will be considered an academic integrity violation and addressed according to Pitt's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). You are the author of your work for the course and authorship means you take responsibility for your words and claims, regardless of which tools you use.

This policy was informed by Pitt's [Writing Institute](#). The landscape around generative AI is complex and ever-changing, so please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions about this policy.

Schedule

“VH” refers to the Van Herk textbook (*What is sociolinguistics?*), “BCM” refers to the Barrett, Cramer, & McGowan textbook (*English with an accent*); numbers refer to chapters. All other readings are available in the [Readings folder](#).

Week	Day	Date	Topic <i>Notes</i>	Required reading	Optional reading
1	Tues	Jan 13	Introduction	Syllabus	
	Thurs	Jan 15		VH 1, BCM 3 ¹	

¹ This reading refers to some concepts introduced in BCM 1 & 2 (e.g., *d/Discourse*, *language ideologies*). You'll learn about those concepts when you read BCM 1 & 2, so feel free to either ignore those terms till then or read BCM 1 & 2 early.

Week	Day	Date	Topic <i>Notes</i>	Required reading	Optional reading
2	Tues Thurs	Jan 20 Jan 22	Language and society	VH 2 BCM 1 ² , BCM 2	
3	Tues Thurs	Jan 27 Jan 29	Place	VH 3, BCM 5 BCM 9	Bloomquist & Gooden 2015 Alfaraz & Preston 2024
4	Tues Thurs	Feb 3 Feb 5	Time	VH 5 BCM 10	Hay et al. 2015 Riverin-Coutlée et al. 2024
5	Tues Thurs	Feb 10 Feb 12	Race & ethnicity	VH 6 BCM 6	King 2021 Mesthrie 2012
6	Tues Thurs	Feb 17 Feb 19	Gender & sexuality <i>Sociolinguistic autobiography drafts due by start of class</i>	VH 7 Kiesling 2004	
7	Tues Thurs	Feb 24 Feb 26	Social status	VH 4 BCM 4	Dickson & Hall-Lew 2017 Lindemann 2002
8	Tues Thurs	Mar 3 Mar 5	Style & interaction <i>Sociolinguistic autobiography revisions due by start of class</i>	VH 8 VH 9	Zhang 2005 Podesva 2011
9	Tues Thurs	Mar 10 Mar 12	No class: Spring Break		
10	Tues Thurs	Mar 17 Mar 19	Midterm Genres in writing	Young 2011	

² Please be aware: This reading includes frank discussions of institutional violence against Black people (and other manifestations of White supremacy) in the context of sociolinguistics.

Week	Day	Date	Topic <i>Notes</i>	Required reading	Optional reading
11	Tues	Mar 24	Attitudes & ideologies	VH 12	Holliday & Squires 2021
	Thurs	Mar 26		Villarreal & Kohn 2021	Montgomery & Moore 2018
12	Tues	Mar 31	Language contact <i>Term paper topics due by start of class</i>	VH 11	Rickford 2015
	Thurs	Apr 2		BCM 11	Kang et al. 2015
13	Tues	Apr 7	Multilingualism	VH 10	Carter 2014
	Thurs	Apr 9		BCM 7	Cioè-Peña 2021
14	Tues	Apr 14	Language planning & policy	VH 13	Cowie 2007
	Thurs	Apr 16		BCM 14	Rickford & King 2016
15	Tues	Apr 21	Computational sociolinguistics	Kiesling et al. 2018	
	Thurs	Apr 23		Koenecke et al. 2020	
	Fri	Apr 24			<i>Term paper drafts due by 11:59pm</i>
Finals	Mon	Apr 27	Term paper revision workshop (12–1:50pm)		
	Fri	May 1	<i>Term paper revisions due by 11:59pm</i>		