

Field Methods in Sociolinguistics

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[contact information]

Course description

In this course we will be concerned with field methods most commonly used in socially-oriented studies of language variation and change. We will discuss both ethnographic and linguistic interviews of a wide range of types, from the traditional dialectological (briefly) to the various methods used in sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics (in detail. This will involve discussion of the nature and composition of the data base (which follows from the type of data needed), the identification and selection of informants, issues of ethics and cultural expectations, approaching informants and working with them. We will consider, briefly, the issue of age of informants and methods specific to working with children, from the elicitation of data to the protection of children's privacy and rights.

The main body of the course will be taken up with targeting and designing a wide range of interview types, from one-on-one focused to participant-observation in self-recruited groups. We will think especially about the design of materials to elicit large numbers of tokens for specific changes in progress, and how to move beyond word lists and reading passages. We will consider the challenges of both rural and urban data collection, and mono- and bilingual communities.

Students enrolled both in this course and in Professor Milroy's 842.1 (Sociolinguistic Analysis and Interpretation) will be encouraged to work on existing projects, or to work on one new project simultaneously in both seminars, focusing on different issues for each class. The courses are designed to dovetail in terms of subject areas covered. Students can receive credit for enrollment in both sections of 842.

Readings

I will make one or more copies of each reading available to the class, but I expect you as a group to decide how best to duplicate and/or share these materials. I have purposefully not put together a course pack, in order to give you more control about the amount of paper you are responsible for. A list of readings is appended at the end of this syllabus.

Grading

Your grade will be based on 1) participation in class discussion (quantity and quality); 2) written assignments (short and seldom); 3) the materials you design for your semester project, your execution of that project, and your presentation of it to the class.

Semester project

Targeting one phonological and one syntactic variable, we will set up a master project for the class. Each student will have responsibility for one small portion of it, that is, each student will target a specific language community within Ann Arbor (or, if not practicable for students travelling here from elsewhere, from elsewhere) and design materials targeted for that group. The targeted group can and should have greater significance for the student's future work. For example, a targeted group might be: preschool children of color, or adult bilingual second generation Asians -- in as far as a group is relevant to the targeted variation which interests us. The student will be expected to actually design, conduct and record a one-hour interview with a targeted and recruited individual or individuals, and to provide a partial transcription of that interview, as well as the audiotape. Details will be discussed at length in class.

Syllabus

Date	
September 9	Organizational. What we'll do; how we'll do it. Semester project and assignments. What you're working on and how we'll fit that in.
September 16	The speech community: how to define it, and what your definition says about your theoretical orientation. Types of speech communities of interest to the class. Schools and approaches; group vs. individual behaviors; stratificational vs. network analysis
September 23	Asking questions of ourselves: what do we want to know? How theory structures methodology. Setting up a pilot study of a) glide deletion and b) who/that/which variation. In broad terms, outlining a) targeted data; b) targeted language community; c) informants; d) approach and methods (including recording equipment)
September 30 October 7	Targeting a community, and the speakers in it.; Sampling procedures, comparative. Communities within communities. Researcher's relationship to the community; limitations on researcher. Comparative value and reward systems; cultural conflicts and potential clashes. Approaching potential informants. How to talk to strangers and build on established relationships and networks.
October 14	Setting up our study in Ann Arbor. Choice of speech communities within the community. Discussion of theoretical and methodological complications.
	At the end of this class, each participant will have a targeted community within Ann Arbor, external to the university community.

October 21	Designing the interview: breaking it down, ordering elements.
October 28	Gaining permission. Human subject issues; ethics in recording. 1) Direct interview design. a) Social and ethnographic data. Questionnaires, design, pro/con. What to ask; what to ask indirectly. b) Observer's paradox, and how to overcome it. Near-death experiences, ghosts and politics. pros/cons of these approaches.
November 4	2) Self-recruited group; participant observer. Materials, activities. Recording issues (note taking, etc. Transcription issues. ...continued. 3) targeted variables, reading lists, etc. Pros/cons. Design. Traditional approaches; games, pictures. 4) fast and anonymous data.
November 11	Putting it all together.
November 18, 25	Audio/transcript in class: discussion and constructive criticism
December 2, 9	(two students per session.

Reading list

- Briggs, Charles L. 1984. Learning How to Ask: Native Metacommunicative Competence and the Incompetence of Fieldworkers. Language in Society 13.1: 1-28
- Cameron, D 2001. Working with spoken discourse. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. 2009. Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage Publications.
- Dwyer, A.M. 2006. Ethics and practicalities of cooperative fieldwork and analysis. Essentials of language documentation 178: 31.
- Feagin, C. 2002. Entering the community: Fieldwork. The handbook of language variation and change 76: 20-39.
- Haskell, R.E. 2009. Unconscious linguistic referents to race: analysis and methodological frameworks. Discourse & Society 201: 59-84.
- Jucker, A.H. 2009. Speech act research between armchair, field and laboratory: The case of compliments. Journal of Pragmatics 41.8: 1611-1635.
- Labov, W. 1981. Field methods of the project on linguistic change and variation. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Larmouth, D.W. 1992. The Legal and Ethical Status of Surreptitious Recording in Dialect Research: Do Human Subjects Guidelines Apply? Legal and Ethical Issues in Surreptitious Recording. Dennis Baron, ed. (Publication of the American Dialect Society; 76) Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1-14.
- Lindlof, T.R. & Taylor, B.C. 2010. Qualitative Communication Research Methods. Sage Publications.
- Milroy, L & Gordon, M. 2003. Sociolinguistics: Method and Interpretation. John Wiley & Sons.
- Milroy, L. 1987. Observing and analyzing natural language. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Phillips, B.S. 1981. Lexical diffusion and Southern *tune, duke, news*. American Speech 56: 72-79.

- Schrag, B. 2008. Piercing the Veil: Ethical Issues in Ethnographic Research. Science and Engineering Ethics 152: 135–160.
- Solorzano, D.G. & Yosso, T.J. 2002. Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. Qualitative Inquiry 81: 23–44.
- Starks, Donna & Paltridge, Brian 1996. A note on using sociolinguistic methods to study non-native attitudes towards English. World Englishes 152: 217–224.
- Wolfram, Walt 2010. Fieldwork Methods in Language Variation. In Ruth Wodak, Barbara Johnstone, & Paul Kerswill (eds.), The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics. Sage Publications: 296–312.