LLL250   Introduction to American English

1st and 2nd quarters, Junior

Instructor	Charles Jannuzi
Style of class	Lecture, Seminar
Number of Credits	2
Day and Period	To be advised

Course Description

This course is a survey of American English through its dialects and accents. Some of the dialects and the sub-cultures that give rise to them that will be examined. These include the following: Gullah Geechee, Lanappe, Tidewater Brogues/White Coastal English, Pennsylvania Dutch English, Pittsburgh English, and Louisiana Cajun English. The term 'dialect' concerns variations in grammar, vocabulary, and idioms. Such variations can mark a given speaker as belonging to an identified dialect. Even communication strategies can identify a person as belonging to a dialect. For example, American English speakers might have very different ways of speaking in order to get to know someone for the first time. Strategies for making small talk can also vary. The term 'accent' is also often considered a part of dialect. It will cover aspects of the variations of pronunciation of spoken language as an element of identified dialects. Such variations in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation/accent will be compared and contrasted with the ideal of standard American English (also called 'General American'). In addition to socio-linguistic analysis, the course will also look at key aspects of the sub-cultures that give rise to, maintain, and reinforce linguistic differences within the political boundaries of the U.S.

The course will also emphasize the practical aspects of dialects and accents for students of English. For example, what if you were going to do a home-stay in the US? Are you prepared for the shock of real, rapidly spoken English? Could you understand a simple question like, "Did you eat yet?" if it sounded more like, "JEAT-JET?" This course will familiarize you with a lot of American English as it is actually spoken across the country. Most everyone embodies a dialect of a language and speaks with an accent. The purpose of studying of dialects and accents of American English is not simply to engage in academic analysis of them. Rather, the main goal here is to help students to understand how dialects and accents typically represent American English in everyday life. They are not unusual. They are the norm.

Course Objectives

The goals of the course for students' achievement include the following:

(1) An introduction to basic concepts, principles and practices of of socio-linguistics.

(2) An overview of American English compared to other standards of English, such as the standards heard on the TOEIC listening test.

(3) A comparison of standard American English with the actual, dominant spoken vernaculars of white, black, Hispanic and Native Americans.

(4) A comparison of the dominant spoken vernaculars with interesting examples of distinctive American dialects and accents.

(5) An applied understanding of how to solicit, record, and analyze linguistic data that reveal language variations.

(6) A comparison of American English and other forms of English with the students' native language, such as Japanese.

(7) A look at key aspects of other language speakers' English (such as patterns in Japanese speakers of English), and how they are comparable to a dialect. In other words, non-native English as a dialect of world English.

Prerequisites

LLL 210: Introduction to Linguistics (or the equivalent)

Class Materials

(1) Orion, G. (2011). Pronouncing American English: Sounds, Stress, and Intonation, third edition. Boston,
MA: Heinle Cengage ELT.

(2) MacNeil, R. & Cran, W. (2005). Do You Speak American? New York: Manner Books.

(3) Prints and multi-media provided by the instructor.

Course Methods

The classes will be conducted as a mix of short lectures and presentations, pair and small group discussions, and student pair and group contributions. For example, a particular linguistic point will be explained. Students working in pairs or small groups will have assignments that require them to find other examples, including examples from their own first languages, from field work, and from research on the Internet. They will present their results to the rest of the class. This information will also be analyzed and discussed.

Evaluation/Assessment

Evaluation criteria are the following:

(1) Written responses to the content and issues discussed in the readings (5 short papers).

(2) Participation in class discussions.

(3) Homework finding examples to illustrate linguistic points and sharing them with the class.

(4) Devising and implementing a small-scale research tool for sociolinguistic analysis (pair or small group work).

Grading

Grades (as a % of 100%):
(1) Written responses to the readings (20%).

(2) Participation in class, including short presentations (30%).

(3) Final group project, small-scale research tool for sociolinguistic analysis (50%).

Course Schedule

Session 1:
Overview of socio-linguistics--principles, concepts, methods.
Instructor's prints.
Preview of assigned reading.

Session 2:
 Continue overview of socio-linguistics.
 Discussion of previous week's reading.
 Instructor's prints.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session 3:
 Overview of phonological and phonetic analysis useful for socio-linguistics.
 Introduction to Standard American English--comparing it to other forms of English.
 Pronunciation practice from Onion book.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session 4:
 Standard American English compared to actual prevailing American vernaculars (white, black, Hispanic, and Native American).
 Continue pronunciation practice from Onion book.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session 5:
 Analyzing data, transcription practice.
 Continue pronunciation practice from Onion book.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session 6:
 Continue analyzing data, transcription practice.
 Continue pronunciation practice from Onion book.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session 7:
 American dialect: Appalachian
 Introduction to Appalachian culture.
 Analyzing features of Appalachian dialect and accent.
 Transcription.
 Reading from MacNeil book.
 Continue practice from Onion book.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session8:
 American dialect: Tidewater
 Introduction to Tidewater culture.
 Analyzing features of Tidewater dialect and accent.
 Transcription.
 Reading from MacNeil book.
 Continue practice from Onion book.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session 9:
 American dialect: Lanappe
 Introduction to Lanappe culture.
 Analyzing features of Lanappe dialect and accent.
 Transcription.
 Reading from MacNeil book.
 Continue practice from Onion book.
 Preview of assigned reading.

Session 10:
 American dialect: Gullah-Geechee.
 Introduction to Gullah-Geechee culture.
 Analyzing features of Gullah-Geechee dialect and accent.
 Transcription.

Reading from MacNeil book.

Preview of assigned reading.

Session 11:

American dialect: Pennsylvania Dutch English.

Introduction to Pennsylvania German, Pennsylvania Dutch culture

Analyzing features of Pennsylvania Dutch dialect and accent, comparison with Pittsburgh English.

Transcription.

Reading and discussion from MacNeil book.

Preview of assigned reading.

Session 12:

American dialect: Louisiana Cajun.

Introduction to Louisiana Creole and Cajun French, Louisiana Creole and Cajun cultures.

Analyzing features of Louisiana Cajun dialect.

Transcription.

Reading and discussion from MacNeil book.

Preview of assigned reading.

Session 13:

Soliciting linguistic data to reveal variations in dialect and accent.

Discovering an isogloss and clusters of isoglosses (e.g., variations in sounds, word pronunciations, words and phrases, and idioms).

Using semantic feature analysis to discover what people's concepts of word meaning actually are.

Preview of assigned reading.

Session 14:

Pair or group work, devising sets of language features to solicit linguistic data that reveal variations in dialect and accent.

Small-scale field work, including using the internet to get data.

Session 15-16:

Continue pair or group work, devising sets of language features to solicit linguistic data that reveal variations in dialect and accent.

Small-scale field work, including using the internet to get data.

Turn in final report on results of the small-scale field work.

Turn in self-evaluation of learning and evaluation of the course.

Preparation and Follow-up

(1) Between most weekly classes, students must do homework. The homework consists of a reading assignment and also a transcription practice exercise. For this course, there are two types of transcription assignments. One, assignments that require students to demonstrate a working knowledge of IPA and phonetic and phonological analysis of spoken language. Two, assignments that require students to listen to recordings of spoken English and to put it into written English. For this sort of transcription, standard English spelling can be used. These will take students about 2 hours per week, either as individual self-study or as group work. Doing the readings and the transcription practice exercises are necessary preparation for the next class.

(2) In most weekly classes, we will check the answers to the transcription practice exercises. We will also discuss the previously assigned reading.

(3) In most weekly classes, we will preview the homework--both the next transcription practice exercise and the assigned reading. Students will be given some class time to get started on the transcription practice exercises to make sure they understand the tasks. The instructor will give a

brief overview of the assigned reading to make sure students can read it better in order to prepare for the next class.