

Department: Linguistics

Course No: 102

Credits: 3

Title: Language and Environment

Contact: Harry van der Hulst

Content Area: CA2-Social Sciences

Diversity: CA4 International

Catalog Copy: LING 1020. Language and Environment

(102) Second semester. Three credits.

Effects of geography, society, and politics on language use and variation (sociolinguistics). The geographical spread, growth and death of languages (language ecology). CA 2. CA 4-INT.

Course Information: Description: This course deals with the interface between language and the social institutions that depend on it in different parts of the world as well as interaction of language with the physical environment. Students gain a basic understanding of the elements of language analysis and learn to integrate this knowledge with an analysis of social and political influences on languages and groups.

Course requirements: There are three multiple-choice exams plus a final which are designed to test concepts rather than facts such as dates or names. Reading assignments are from the text, usually one chapter for each week of class. There are 14 exercises which are done individually or in groups in class. Some of these involve demonstration experiments designed to show how claims about the topics could be tested. Some involve responses to those experiments or discussion of questions. Some involve role-playing to show the different view points available in other cultures.

Topics Language as a product of innate cognitive capacity, syntax, semantics, phonetics, phonology as descriptions of cognitive systems for different languages, theories about the earliest human languages, language factors in gender roles and social class in different cultures, the changes brought about by writing systems, clashes between different languages and government policies in relation to language.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: 2. Intellectual breadth/versatility: Students learn important facts concerning

the relationship between language and the environment in which language functions.

Acquire critical judgment: Students are presented with various analyses and claims and the data used to support them. In each content area opposing claims and approaches are compared and students are encouraged to question the assumptions and methods of each.

5. Acquire awareness of era and society: students are provided with information about the way that language influences situations at all levels, and so they will recognize the forces that have created our society and other societies and the way that language and social institutions have

changed, and continue to change through their interactions.

6. Acquire consciousness of diversity of human culture and experience. Many different languages and cultures will be examined to show the way that they interact.

CA2 Criteria: Introduce students to theories and concepts. The concepts of linguistic variables, social class, gender differences, ethnicity, group dynamics, language as an innately determined cognitive system, theories of language change as it relates to social forces will be introduced and applied.

Methods. Methods of language description, data collection, uses of statistics, experimental methods of sociolinguistic analysis, will be discussed in relation to the topics. Demonstration experiments will lead to a discussion of experimental methods. There will be discussions of the study of groups in undeveloped areas, intellectual property rights and the need to provide educational opportunities to native consultants.

How groups behave and influence each other. Language is interactive at all levels, individual, group, institution and society. Conversation patterns between individuals, ways in which group behavior is influenced by language and influences other groups, ways in which governments and institutions use language to control people and situations, and how language differences influence the actions of governments and groups and individuals, are examples of the interactions which will be described and discussed.

Tools. An important element will be emphasis on critical thinking. Evaluation of different approaches and claims will be focused and an attempt will be made to foster recognition of the difficulties of testing situations.

CA4 Criteria: Varieties of human experience: The very essence of this course is the way that a specific language influences the social and cultural environment and how this environment influences the change of language. By necessity then a large part of the content will be differences in human experience. One of the central concerns is how perception is influenced by language usage and how a culture is reflected in a language. Another important emphasis is the difference between the linguistic value of a variable and the social value of a variable. Awareness of dynamics: The varieties of human experience as they relate to language differences involve social and political power and indirectly economic power because the value of linguistic forms in a social context varies with the social power of the group or individual. The correlation is an important element in many discussions in this course. The different ways in which groups use language for political advantage both on the small scale and larger scale are a major topic.

International: Every topic in this course deals with cultures outside the U.S. because it is necessary to compare the forces at work in our culture to those forces in other cultures.

Role of Grad Students: The Fall version of this course is supported by 2 TA's. Ling 102 usually has 150 students. This number makes it essential to have help with maintaining records, administering exams, copying hand outs, answering student questions about content and record keeping, administering make up exams. In addition an essential part of this course are demonstration experiments and exercises involving problem solving, done in class for over half of the meetings. These are like mini-labs in that they help illustrate the points in the lecture and provide a kind of hands on involvement in the topics for students. These provide enrichment of

the learning experience but they require more attention than one or even two people can provide. These exercises also require more record keeping.