

Content Area: Group 4 and Group 2

Department: Linguistics

Course No.: 150

Credits: 3

Title: Introduction to Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community

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Content Area: CA2 Social Sciences

Diversity: CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism (Non-International)

Catalog Copy: LING 150. Introduction to Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community Either semester. Three credits. Sociolinguistics, demographics of the Deaf community; study of Deaf subgroups with different sociological, linguistic and cultural backgrounds; sociolinguistic integration of community members with the larger population in their cultural/ethnic community. Knowledge of American Sign Language is not required.

Course Information: 1a. Course Description: Introduction to Sociolinguistics of the Deaf community. We will learn about subgroups within the Deaf community with different sociological, linguistic and cultural backgrounds and how sociolinguistic integration with the larger population in their cultural/ethnic group is viewed by the Deaf community and beyond. Issues of power and identity struggle related to language will be discussed with respect to the Deaf community.

1b. Course requirements: Weekly readings are extracted from books and articles in the research field. There will be two exams: mid- term and final. The format of these exams will be a combination of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and open-ended questions for short answers. There is also a final term paper required. The student will choose his/her topic from the topics studied in the class.

1c. List the major themes, issues, topics to be covered:

- Introduction to sociolinguistics: Basic concepts of language and society
- Introduction to culture: Cultural groups within the U.S
- Discussion of sociolinguistics with respect to Deaf culture, ASL, and the Deaf community
- Multiculturalism in the Deaf community: cultural identity vs. ethnic identity
- Language choice and use in the Deaf community: ASL vs. English
- Language choice and multiculturalism: choice of language vs. ethnic/ cultural identity
- Language imperialism; socioeconomic and linguistic politics in the Deaf community

- Guest speakers from the Deaf community

Meets Goals of Gen Ed.: Two goals in particular are integral to this proposed course: 6- 'Acquire consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience', and 7- 'Acquire a working understanding of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and use knowledge'.

6- The course content is geared directly towards introducing the student to the issues of multiculturalism in the Deaf community. By showing how the Deaf community in America constitutes a cultural group, students are exposed to a new way of thinking about Deaf persons, and come to a clearer understanding of what constitutes a culture. Their awareness of and sensitivity to multiculturalism and diversity within America is enhanced by learning about this culture from one of its members (the instructor herself and guest speakers).

7- The course provides a study of sociolinguistic and cultural processes within the Deaf community. When we look at a small segment of society that has its own language and culture distinct from the population at large, we gain a better understanding of the mechanisms that drive cultural identity and the language choices that are made. Understanding the processes of linguistic choices/use, diversity within the Deaf community, and the tension between the subgroups and the larger population, helps the student be able to apply those processes to their own roles in society.

CA2 Criteria: 1. Introduce students to theories and concepts of social sciences. This course covers introduction to sociolinguistics and culture. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, looking at variation in language, language contact, bilingualism, language attitudes and the relationship between social interaction and language. This will then be applied to the sociolinguistic processes with the study of multiculturalism in the Deaf community.

2. Introduce students to methods used in the social sciences, including considerations of the ethical problems social scientists face. The students will learn about qualitative research methodology that is primarily used in sociolinguistics. Using qualitative methodology has its advantages and limitations, both of which the student will learn about. The students will learn about unique ethical considerations in dealing with the Deaf community due to its small size and language use by the interview versus the language used by the consultants.

3. Introduce students to ways in which individuals, groups, institutions, or societies behave and influence one another and the natural environment. Students will learn about the strong tension between the expectations of the Deaf community and the expectations of the larger 'hearing' population, and even more so for those from a different cultural/ethnic heritage. Language choice/use is defined in terms of one's identity with a particular group. This course will investigate how multiculturalism is handled in the Deaf community, looking at different subgroups within the Deaf community, i.e Asian, African-American, Hispanic and others.

4. Provide students with tools to analyze social, political, or economic groups/organizations (such as families, communities, or governments) and to examine the social issues and problems at the individual, cultural, societal, national, or international level.

Social issues may include issues of gender, race, social class, political power, economic power, and cross-cultural interaction. All of these issues are addressed in this course, along with issues relating to power and identity struggle with respect to language choice/use. More specifically, we will look at linguistic attitudes by individuals belonging to more than one linguistic community. One major issue concerns provision of education and other services in an accessible manner (generally through the use of ASL), but this involves considerable struggle because of the socio-political power of the hearing majority, who may not have the same views of what is best for Deaf people.

CA4 Criteria: 1. Emphasize that there are varieties of human experiences, perceptions, thoughts, values, and/or modes of creativity. As taught by a member of this group, the course will highlight the concepts, ideas, beliefs, and values of Deaf culture, and the relation between these issues and language choices. By showing how the Deaf community in America constitutes a cultural group, students are exposed to a new way of thinking about Deaf persons, and come to a clearer understanding of what constitutes a culture. Their awareness of and sensitivity to multiculturalism and diversity within America is enhanced by learning about this culture from one of its members.

5. Develop an awareness of the dynamics of social, political, and/or economic power in the context of any of the above four items. The Deaf community has typically had much less social/political power than the dominant one, and this has played a role in decision-making of great concern to its members, particularly in areas of educational policy and language policy. Reactions of the Deaf community and ways that the group has increased its power will be addressed.

Supplementary Information: Funding for the development of this course was obtained from a Provost's General Education course development Grant.

No other courses at UConn portray the lives of Deaf people as a cultural group. Most people do not even realize that there is a distinct Deaf culture with their own language distinct from English.

While students are generally aware of distinct ethnic or racial cultural groups, even a superficial awareness of the cultural status of persons with disabilities is rare. This course will contribute greatly to students' understanding of the multi-cultural diversity of the U.S. as well as the multi-cultural diversity within a small segment of U. S. society.