

Department: Linguistics

Course No: 244W

Credits: 3

Title: Language and Culture

Contact: Harry van der Hulst

Content Area: CA2-Social Sciences and CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism- International

WQ: Writing

Catalog Copy: 244W. Language and Culture. Either semester. Three credits. Three one-hour lectures weekly. Prerequisite: ENGL 105 or 110 or 111 or 250. Not open for credit to students who have passed ANTH 244 prior to Fall 1998. Anderson, Bar-Shalom. The study of language, culture, and their relationship. Topics include the evolution of the human language capacity; the principles of historical language change including reconstruction of Indo-European and Native American language families; writing systems; linguistic forms such as Pidgins and Creoles arising from languages in contact; the interaction between language and political systems, the struggle for human rights, gender, ethnicity, and ethnobiology.

Course Information: a. Course description: This course deals with the interaction between language and aspects of culture in many areas of the world. The goals are to make students aware of the many ways that specific languages and language in general are used by people to create and modify their environment and ways in which languages are constantly changed by social and political forces. The objective is to channel this awareness into an ability to write coherently about the complicated issues of this interaction.

Course requirements: There is one exam plus a final with short essay questions, one five-page paper and one ten page paper. They are chosen from topics in the syllabus and require library research. The grade is derived 50% from the writing assignments and 50 % from the exams and presentations.

Topics include the biological bases of language, the historical development of anthropological linguistics, theories of the evolution of the language capacity in humans, the ways that cultural attitudes are reflected in language, the correlation of social class, gender, age, and ethnicity with linguistic variables, the function of taboo terms, the structural differences between pidgins and creoles, issues of language and politics and the history of writing systems.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: In an attempt to help students acquire critical judgment (goal 3), emphasis is placed on examining the claims dealing with language and culture from the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology and linguistics. In class discussion and in writing assignments students are encouraged to question the assumptions and methods and compare conclusions. The topics deal with the use of language in many different cultures, and relating that language use to the constraints and diverse options of other cultures. This promotes awareness of era and society (goal 5). Because the lectures, discussions and writing involve critical thinking

rather than “banking” facts the goal of gaining an understanding of acquiring and using knowledge is promoted (goal 7). A major emphasis is placed on critical analysis of established claims and using library sources.

CA2 Criteria: a. Theories involving the interaction of social forces within cultures and between cultures are a central part of the language culture interface. The ways in which individuals and social and political institutions use language to control and manipulate are important concepts discussed.

b. Methods of linguistic analysis, including syntactic, phonetic and semantic methods are introduced. Methods of data collection are studied, together with the ethical problems of studying groups with non-traditional cultures, and the intellectual property rights of native consultants.

c. Most topics in this course involve the interaction of individuals and groups, from the origin of language (where social forces in human ancestors could have led to the evolution of the language capacity) to studies of conversation patterns between genders, to how governments use language to control people and how language use influences self esteem of individuals and groups.

d. Tools to help students analyze social issues are provided through studies of gender, ethnic groups, social class, and age groups, which are examined in terms of language issues. The political and economic power gained by control of language in monolingual and multilingual cultures also demonstrates to students how they can use these analytical tools.

CA4 Criteria: A key assumption of this course is that all languages share a basic structure derived from innate cognitive structures common to all humans, but the ways in which different cultures use that structure to express the concerns and creative drive of their own group is the main emphasis. The questions of whether a language reflects the points of emphasis of a culture and whether language use can influence attitudes, are examined in depth. This course thus meets criterion 1, *the varieties of human experience*. Students are exposed to the ways in which social groups use language to exclude others and to promote their own agenda. The various methods of governmental and quasi-governmental bodies to control language use and thus to control the opportunities of diverse groups are examined to *develop an awareness of social, political and economic power* (criterion 5).

This course meets the *international requirement* because one of the main emphases is to compare issues in different cultures. These issues include the origin of language, questions about the effect of language on the attitudes of individuals and groups, gender dynamics, clashes of languages, and political issues of language use. Most of the discussion involves differences in language use in these diverse areas, but whenever possible language and cultural universals are pointed out.

W Criteria: 1. The following writing requirement *will enable and enhance learning in the content areas*. One 5-page paper and one 10 page paper are required. These papers count for 50% of the grade. The two exams and exercises count for 50% but it is stated in the syllabus that the writing portion must be passed in order to pass the course. The 5- page paper deals with a central issue, the effect of language on attitudes and behavior and it involves a comparison of 3 papers dealing with that question. Students must master the content in order to compare the approaches. The 10-page paper requires a library search, a written description of the topic and

sources, which is reviewed, and a revision of the first draft. The topic must be drawn from the topics covered in the course and deepens the students understanding of at least one area.

2. The *primary modes of writing instruction* are material and instruction provided during the lectures, written comments and revisions. All students are taking the course as a W. Instruction is given in lectures about how to organize and analyze, and about common problems encountered in writing both before and after papers are turned in. Detailed comments are given for the 5-page paper and some students use these for a revision. Written description of the topic for the 10-page paper is returned to the students with comments and suggestions. The first draft of the 10-page paper is returned with detailed comments and each revision is returned with comments. Individual conferences are scheduled with students who require it.

3. Revision is required for the 10-page paper and students are encouraged to revise as many times as they wish for both papers. The written topic is returned with comments and some students are required to submit a revision. Oral presentations of other papers by some students lead to comments and revision.