

## **Linguistic Anthropology: On the Power of Gestures, Jokes, and Accents**

Anthropology (NANT3300)  
The New School, Fall 2004  
Tuesdays: 4:00-5:50pm  
Instructor: Rachel Heiman

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We often think of language as simply a means for expressing ideas and exchanging information. But as we move through our daily lives, we continuously construct, negotiate, and contest our social worlds and political conditions through language. In this course, we explore the powerful role that communication (and miscommunication!) play in the formation of gender dynamics, class relations, ethno-racial identities, cultural institutions, and national boundaries. We gain an appreciation for the anthropological subfield of linguistic anthropology, while discovering the ways that linguistic forms and language practices provide insight into our everyday behaviors, cultural formations, and social hierarchies. Readings focus on ideas about language and on the complex dynamics and multiple layers of meaning in everyday language use, ranging from bodega chitchat to dinnertime narratives, from medical exams interviews to drunken humor.

### **Required Readings:**

A coursepack of required reading materials is available for purchase at Advanced Copy Center (552 LaGuardia Place @ 3rd Street). A copy of the coursepack is also being held on reserve at Fogelman Library (65 Fifth Avenue).

### **Assignments and Grading:**

**Class Participation (20%):** Your grade for class participation is not calculated by how much you speak, but rather how you participate in enabling a lively and useful discussion. At times this means bouncing an idea off the group or bringing up something that's puzzling you. At other times this involves asking one of your peers to elaborate more fully on a thought that they are sharing. And sometimes this entails sitting quietly and holding onto an idea that can best be entertained at a later point in the discussion. It is important that everyone get the chance to participate fully in our class discussions. We will be learning as much from each other as we will from our readings and our projects.

**Weekly Journals (30%):** Each week during which there are outside readings (and when your project proposal and final paper are \*not\* due), students are required to submit 1-page of writing (typed, single-spaced). These weekly journals are a chance for you to process your thoughts on the readings that are due that week; to explore links between individual readings; and to make connections between issues raised in the material and your observations of the workings of language in everyday life. In a few instances, I will hand out specific questions.

Your grade for these short writings will reflect your critical engagement with the reading material. Weekly journals will not be accepted after the date on which they are due, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

**“Ethnography of Communication” Proposal (20%):** Students will conduct an ethnography of a speech event of their choosing (e.g. a dinnertime discussion, a political debate, a street corner conversation, etc.). The material can be tape-recorded yourself or can come from a televised event, a newspaper transcription, a film, or a piece of fiction. (Note that the speech event should be no longer than 2 minutes in length. 30 seconds is often plenty for in-depth analysis.) We will discuss the possibilities at length throughout the semester. Each student is required to meet with me to discuss their topic. Appointments will be made during the week of November 2nd.

A proposal for the project will be due on November 23rd. The proposal must include: 1) title and topic; 2) description of the setting, participants, and power dynamics; 3) transcription of the speech event; 4) a preliminary list of linguistic concepts that will be used in the analysis; and 5) a bibliography (in proper citation formatting) of the relevant course readings. No outside research is required, aside from gathering the speech event. Students are expected to draw on at least 3 course readings in their analysis. The proposal should be 3 pages (typed, single-spaced), including the transcription.

**“Ethnography of Communication” Paper (30%):** Students will write a 7-10 page (typed, double-spaced) linguistic analysis of the speech event transcribed in the proposal. Linguistic concepts and course readings from the weeks following the due date of the proposal are to be included as well.

This formal paper is due on December 14th. Proper citation is required, both in regard to the bibliography and to in-text citations. Students are encouraged to meet with a tutor at the University Writing Center (<http://www.newschool.edu/admin/writingcenter/newschoolcntr.html>) before submitting the final draft of the paper. Your grade for the paper will reflect both your critical analysis of the speech event and the writing style of the paper itself.

**No papers or project proposals will be accepted late, extenuating circumstances aside.**

### **Other Important Information:**

**Attendance:** “The New School adheres to a Zero Tolerance Policy regarding absences and requires all credit students to attend every class. Any unexplained absence will adversely affect your grade.”

**Plagiarism:** “The New School adheres to a Zero Tolerance Policy regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism will result in an F in the course at the discretion of the instructor and in accordance

with the University's policy on plagiarism (see Student Handbook). Students should purchase *A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker, available at most book stores, for information on proper citation format. Also keep in mind that self-plagiarism will not be tolerated. Self-plagiarism entails using the same paper for more than one class without previous approval by instructors involved."

**Students with Disabilities:** "In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations should contact the office of Student Disability Services. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to meet with Tom McDonald in the office of Student Disability Services, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, provide an academic accommodation notification letter. Mr. McDonald's office is located in the Graduate Faculty building at 65 Fifth Avenue, Room 409. His direct line is (212) 229-5472. You may also access more information through the University's web site."

### **Class Schedule:**

#### **September 21: Introduction**

- In-class film: *American Tongues*, VHS. Produced and Directed by Andrew Kolker and Louis Alvarez (New York: New Day Films, 1987).

#### **September 28: Language in Culture/Culture in Language**

- Michael Agar, "Culture Blends," "The Circle" and "The Circle and the Field," in *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1994), 13-60.
- Ferdinand de Saussure, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign" and "Invariability and Variability of the Sign" in *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Belly and Albert Sechehaye. Translated by Roy Harris (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1972), 65-78.
- In-class audio: David Sedaris, "Go Carolina" from *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 3-15.

#### **October 5: Linguistic Relativity: The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis**

- Michael Agar, "Cultural Signifieds" in *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1994), 61-72.
- Edward Sapir, "The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society," in *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir*, ed. David Mandelbaum (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1949), 544-559.
- Benjamin Lee Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," in *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1956), 134-159.
- Guest Speaker: Bambi Schieffelin, Professor of Anthropology, New York University

#### **October 12: Metaphor: Highlighting and Hiding**

- George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Concepts We Live By," "The Systematicity of Metaphorical Concepts," and "Metaphorical Systematicity: Highlighting and Hiding," in *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3-13.
- Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12 (Summer 1987): 687-718.

### **October 19: Language Acquisition and Socialization: Producing and Precluding**

- Elinor Ochs and Bambi B. Schieffelin, "Language Acquisition and Socialization: Three Developmental Stories and Their Implications" in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 276-320.
- Susan U. Philips, "Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom" in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001[1970]), 302-317.
- In-class film: Deborah Tannen, *That's Not What I Meant!* VHS (Los Angeles, CA: Into the Classroom Media, 2004).

### **October 26: Ethnography of Communication (and Miscommunication!)**

- Nancy Bonvillian, "Contextual Components: Outline of an Ethnography of Communication" and "Communicative Interactions," in *Language, Culture, and Communication: The Meaning of Messages* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000), 78-131.
- Benjamin Bailey, "Communication of Respect in Interethnic Service Encounters," *Language in Society* 26, no. 3 (1997): 327-356.

### **November 2: Footing: Authority, Alignment, and Control**

- Erving Goffman, "Footing," in *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 124-159.
- Norma Mendoza-Denton, "Pregnant Pauses: Silence and Authority in the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Hearings," in *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*, ed. Kira Hall and Mary Bucholtz (New York: Routledge, 1995), 51-66.
- Elinor Ochs and Carolyn Taylor, "The 'Father Knows Best' Dynamic in Dinnertime Narratives," in *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*, ed. Kira Hall and Mary Bucholtz (New York: Routledge, 1995), 97-120.
- In-class film: *Sex and Justice: Highlights of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings*. VHS. Directed by Julian Schlossberg (New York: First Run/Icarus Films, 1993), selections.
- **DUE: Appointment to Discuss "Ethnography of Communication" Topic**

### **November 9: Code Switching and Bilingualism**

- Ana Celia Zentella, "'Hablose los dos. We speak both.' Studying Bilingualism in the Community Context," "The Community: *el bloque*" and "The Hows and Whys of 'Spanglish'" in *Growing up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 1-40, 80-114.

### **November 16: Framing and Metacommunication**

- Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books: 1972), 177-193.
- Deborah Tannen and Cynthia Wallat, "Interactive Frames and Knowledge Schemas in Interaction: Examples from a Medical Examination/Interview," in *Framing in Discourse*, ed. Deborah Tannen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 57-76.
- Branca Telles Ribeiro, "Framing in Psychotic Discourse," in *Framing in Discourse*, ed. Deborah Tannen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 77-113.

### **November 23: Collusion: On What is \*Not\* Said**

- R.P. McDermott and Henry Tylbor, "On the Necessity of Collusion in Conversation," in *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*, ed. Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim (Urbana, I.L.: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 218-236.
- **DUE: "Ethnography of Communication" Proposal**

### **November 30: Narrative (Inequality): Constructing Selves and National Borders**

- Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, “Narrating the Self,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 19-43.
- Jan Blommaert, “Investigating Narrative Inequality: African Asylum Seekers’ Stories in Belgium,” *Discourse & Society* 12, no. 4 (2001): 413-449.

**December 7: Jokes and the Political (Un)Conscious**

- Joel Sherzer, “Jokes” in *Speech Play and Verbal Art* (Austin, T.X.: University of Texas Press, 2002), 36-53.
- Keith Basso, *Portraits of “the Whiteman”*: *Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols among the Western Apache* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3-82.

**December 14: Discussion of Final Papers**

- **DUE: “Ethnography of Communication” Paper**