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**

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

**October 5: Linguistic Relativity: The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis**
- Guest Speaker: Bambi Schieffelin, Professor of Anthropology, New York University

**October 12: Metaphor: Highlighting and Hiding**
October 19: Language Acquisition and Socialization: Producing and Precluding


October 26: Ethnography of Communication (and Miscommunication!)


November 2: Footing: Authority, Alignment, and Control

- **DUE: Appointment to Discuss “Ethnography of Communication” Topic**

November 9: Code Switching and Bilingualism


November 16: Framing and Metacommunication


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

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

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

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

**December 14: Discussion of Final Papers**
• DUE: “Ethnography of Communication” Paper