Language, Society and Power

LNGS 7002

Semester 2, 2008

Dr. Ahmar Mahboob (Coordinator)

ahmar.mahboob@arts.usyd.edu.au

Department of Linguistics

9351-3548

Office hours:  Monday: 4 – 6 pm & by appointment (#245, Transient Building)
Lectures:  Monday: 7 – 9 pm

Unit Description:
Language is a symbolic currency: mastery of the standard language can buy institutional power; mastery of urban teenage slang can buy street credibility. This course introduces students to key issues in sociolinguistics and language sociology such as the political economy of language, language variation and change, and critical discourse analysis. Members of the class will undertake empirical research.

Unit aims and objectives:
At the end of the course, participants will:
• have a broad understanding of how language relates to and functions in society
• have a critical understanding of the current issues in sociolinguistics
• be able to critically read and use research literature in related fields
• be able to develop and conduct a research project

Assessment:
This unit will involve continuous and on-going assessment. The assessment used in the course is designed to be in congruence with the aims of this unit. The various assignments are designed not only to evaluate the students’ understanding of the field, but also to help them with developing their understanding.

The assessment falls into 2 categories: 1) tasks related to the major research project (which will account for 80% of the total grade), and 2) tasks that are independent of the major research project (which will account for 20% of the final grade). Grades in the unit will be based on:

• Research project (80 points in total) involving:
  1. table of contents / textbook analysis (5 points)
  2. research direction paragraph (2 points)
  3. structure and content analysis of a primary research article (8 points)
  4. critical analysis / review of a primary research article (10 points)
  5. research proposal (5 points)
  6. annotated bibliography (5 points)
  7. draft research project (2 points)
  8. peer-feedback (3 points)
  9. poster presentation (5 points)
  10. research project final draft (35 points)
• Web CT weekly quizzes – 15 pts
• Participation in WebCT discussions – 5 pts

Please see below for details on each assignment.
**Research Project – 80 pts (total)**

The research paper for this course will be staged. Below, I will describe the stages and the point distribution associated with each stage. (Note: all word limits are binding; however, you are allowed a +/- 10% variation. Please include a word count at the bottom of each assignment.)

**Stage 1:**
Table of content / textbook analysis (200 - 250 words): due August 4th – 5 points

Your TOC / textbook analysis will be based on the Stockwell textbook and should include:
- An outline of the structure of the book
- An outline of the topics/fields covered in the book
- A discussion of the area that you think will interest you most
- A reflection of how you can use/benefit from this book

Please look at the model TOC/textbook analysis of the Mesthrie et. al. book as you work on this assignment.

The purpose of this assignment is to help you become familiar with the core textbooks that we will use this semester. This assignment will also introduce you to the various themes/issues/topics explored in this area of studies. This will help you in stage 2 of the research project.

**Stage 2:**
Research project direction paragraph (100 – 150 words): due August 11th – 2 points for timely submission

Your RP direction paragraph should include:
- Expression of interest in your research topic/area
- Explanation of why this topic/area is worth pursuing

This paragraph may be written in an informal style and the purpose of it is to get you thinking about your research project early on in the semester. The topic that you choose here is not necessarily binding, but you should put some thought into the research project paragraph.

In order to complete this task, I suggest that you look at the list of topics included in your textbook and the research areas that are explored in sociolinguistics. You can use your TOC / textbook analysis to help you identify an area of study that interests you.

Writing this research project direction paragraph will help you determine what research papers to choose for stages 3 & 4 of the research project.

**Stages 3 & 4:**
Structure and content analysis of a primary research article (250 – 300 words): due August 18th – 8 points
Critical review of a primary research article (500 words): due August 25th – 10 points

The purpose of these reviews is to boost your critical reading abilities and expose you to some of the current research in sociolinguistics (with a focus on your research area). Your reviews will be graded on your ability to:
- summarize and highlight the key issues raised in the article
- critically discuss the issues raised and demonstrate personal reflection on these
- organize your thoughts and present them in an orderly fashion

I highly recommend that you discuss your article choice with me before writing your reviews. Your AR will not be graded if you choose an inappropriate article.

Please look at model ‘article summaries’ provided to you in class as you work on your structure and content analysis. For the critical review, please see the document “Writing an Article Review” in the Student Resources section of the WebCT for additional information on this assignment. You might also want to read the two sample reviews that I have posted in the resources section.

Before you write your reviews, I suggest that you read the article several times and take notes on a separate notebook (and not simply highlight the original text). You should use these notes to write your reviews. Following this advice will decrease the likelihood that you plagiarize. In my experience, students who work directly from the original text are more likely to copy text from the original in their assignments and therefore be caught (and penalized) for plagiarism.

This assignment is designed to help you become familiar with some of the primary research in the area that you will be working on for your own research project. As you work on this assignment, do pay attention to how the experts in the field design and present their work. In your own research paper, you should consider using the structure/style used by the experts. Do look at how these experts pack a lot of information in a few words – using nominalization, grammatical metaphor, and other linguistic devices. Do also look at how they use tables/diagrams/figures to illustrate and support their analysis. Again, you should try to use these linguistic and stylistic devices in your own work. Using these devices will help you write a cohesive and meaningful text within the limited word space allocated to you.

After reading and reviewing primary research in your area of interest, you will be in a position to develop your own research project proposal (stage 5).

Stage 5:
Research proposal (250 – 500 words): due September 1st – 5 pts

Your research proposals should include:
• Research topic/area
• Specific research questions or hypotheses, if you have any
• Proposed methodology
• Proposed analytical procedure (how will you analyze your data?)
• Proposed reading list (mark any papers that you have already read with an *)

As you develop your research proposal, you might think about replicating a study that you really like (perhaps in a different setting). You may also consider developing a project that extends on a previous study. One advantage of replicating/building a study is that it guides you in collecting, coding, analyzing, and presenting your own research. As you work on your research proposal, do remember to refer/acknowledge your sources in order to avoid plagiarism.
Stage 6:
Annotated bibliography (100 – 125 words per article): due September 15th – 5 pts (for timely submission)

An annotated bibliography is a list of relevant articles, books, etc. that includes a critical summary (approx 100 words) of the reading. For details on how to write an annotated bibliography, see: http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/annotatebib.html http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm

The purpose of this assignment is to give help with increasing your understanding of the topic that you will research. Your annotated bibliography should include at least 5 (research-based) papers that relate to your research topic. I suggest that you focus on research articles (from reputable academic journals) and research-based chapters from edited books for this stage of your assignment. One good way of locating relevant and good material is to locate some recent papers on the topic of your interest and then read the bibliography/reference list of the article to identify other key readings in the area.

You can also find a list of key journals in linguistics at: http://linguistlist.org/pubs/tocs/index.html

Once you have read key research in your area of interest, you should use this to guide your own data collection/analysis. Thus, the annotated bibliography will help you in moving from your research proposal to your research draft.

Stage 7:
Post a draft of your research paper on WebCT - due October 6th - 2 pts (for timely submission)

Stage 8:
Review and respond to at least two other drafts in writing (of students in your group) – due October 13th - 3 pts

The purpose of this stage of the research project is to allow you to look at how your colleagues have written up their drafts. You may get useful tips on how to revise your own paper by looking at their drafts. Providing useful feedback to your colleagues will also provide you with an understanding of how (and why) academics and researchers work collaboratively to support each other by providing critical reviews of in-progress work.

As you work on this assignment, please remember that you are writing this review for your colleagues to learn from and use in revising their work – therefore, do spend some time and thought on providing this feedback. This might mean that you scan through some of the primary research papers that your colleagues are using in work (this will also broaden your reading and understanding of the field). One key thing in writing your review is to ask yourself this question: Would I find this feedback useful if I were the author of the draft research paper? Your answer to this question should be ‘Yes’ 😊

In reviewing your peers’ work, focus on the content, organization, and the language used. The following are a few suggested questions that you might want to consider as you review your colleagues’ drafts:
Content:
- Does the draft address the primary purpose of the assignment?
- Does the author share the main arguments in the paper?
- Is the draft convincing? Does the author provide appropriate details and examples to support their claims?
- Are there any issues/questions that have not been addressed?
- Is the information presented relevant to the main arguments? Or is it redundant or unnecessary?

Organization:
- Is the draft well organized?
- Does it flow logically?
- Are the various arguments/examples well connected and cohesive?
- Does the author repeat him/herself without furthering their arguments?

Language:
- Is the choice of language (vocabulary, grammar, tone etc.) appropriate for the assignment? (Do feel free to include specific examples from the draft in your feedback to help the author.)

In writing your reviews, consider the following questions (you should use these as a guide when you are writing your own paper as well).
- Is/are the research goal(s)/aim(s) clearly articulated?
- If there are any specific research questions, are they clearly articulated?
- Are the technical terms operationalized?
- Are there any broad generalizations/assumptions? If yes, are they supported through literature? If not, should they be?
- Are the research goals/questions justified by showing a gap in the literature (theoretical justification) and/or a practical justification?
- Is the literature cited appropriate for the topic/questions (in terms of relevance)?
- Is the literature discussed in appropriate depth?
- Is the methodology used to elicit/collection the data clearly articulated?
- Is detailed information provided about the source, participants, etc?
- Is the technique of data analysis clearly articulated?
- Is the research methodology appropriate for the research question/project?
- Are the results described in detail?
- Are tables/figures (if any) discussed in the text?
- Are the results discussed in relation to relevant literature?
- Are the findings clearly articulated?
- Are the limitations of the study shared?
- Are directions for future research etc. shared?

As you read and review your colleagues' research drafts, I suggest that you:
1. Start with a positive comment
2. Provide a summary of what you think the paper is about
3. Share your critique of the draft (see the list of questions above as a guide)
4. Provide suggestions and give ideas on how to improve the paper
5. End with a positive note

There is no upper word limit on your peer reviews. However, I do expect that your responses will be a minimum of 250 words each.
You will need to print and submit copies of the feedback that you provided to your colleagues. Copies of your feedback will be due in my Assignment Drop Box on October 13th. No late submissions will be acceptable for this stage of the research project.

**Stage 9:**
Present your findings in class during a poster-conference.
Presentation date: October 20th – 5 points

To receive a grade for your poster presentation, please take a picture of your poster and post it in the assignment box on WebCT – before 6 pm on Oct 20th. You should also post a copy of the image in the Discussion Folder for your colleagues to refer to.

The purpose of this stage of the assignment is for you to share and exchange ideas about your research projects. In my experience, presenting one’s work gives one an opportunity to see the gaps/problems in one’s work. This self/other criticism/feedback is very useful in revising one’s work.

Please remember that an effective poster presentation is one in which one presents one’s work in an interesting, meaningful, interactive, and engaging manner. There are no definite rules of how one develops a poster, but there are a number of things that one should definitely avoid (we will deduct points from your poster presentation grade for these problems):

- too much text
- too little information
- text/font size too small
- lack of organization
- poor graphs/visualization
- poster lay out
- poster size

A good poster usually has enough information for the audience to get a sense of the researcher’s work by looking through the poster. However, it is developed in a way to make the audience curious about the work and therefore engage with the author/others to discuss the ideas further.

A good poster presentation discussion can be very rewarding for both the presenter and the audience and you should carefully consider how you design your poster. I suggest that you look at the posters in the Transient Bldg (2nd floor hallway) and judge for yourselves if these are good or bad models. A good model should give you enough information to understand the project, but leave you with a desire to learn more. A bad model is one that doesn’t really tell you what the project is about or provides so much detail that it looks like a research paper and not a poster (e.g. when people cut and paste whole sections of the paper onto the poster).

There are a number of websites that give advice on how to make a poster. One that I thought was quite good can be found at [http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters](http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters)

**Stage 10:**
Revise and submit the final version of your research paper (2000 - 2500 words) - Due October 27th - 35 points.
**General info on the research project:**

A successful research project is a lengthy process. You cannot write a good paper in a week or two. In order for you to have a satisfactory paper, you should start your work in the early part of the semester. You should read relevant journal articles / book chapters and use this information to develop your ideas/questions/methodology. Your reading of the literature should also be reflected in your data analysis.

There are two common problems with students’ research papers (you should try to avoid these):

1. Literature review: students tend to summarize the literature that they have read rather than assimilating it into their paper. A good use of the literature is your ability to critically analyse the paper and your ability to use/refer to the sections that are directly relevant to your paper. A summary of your readings, if it is not directly relevant to the paper, is redundant and weakens the paper.
2. Examples/tables/charts: students tend to use examples, tables, and figures etc. without accompanying textual discussion. They seem to assume that a reader will find these to be self-explaining. They are not. A good paper describes and discusses examples, tables, figures etc. A discussion of the examples that you cite helps the reader interpret them in a specific way and follow your line of thought.

The research project will be evaluated and assessed on the following criteria:

1. Timely submission of each part
2. Appropriateness of length, clarity of expression and appropriate use of the APA
3. Development and clear description of your goals (including your research question(s) / hypothesis/es, if any).
4. A suitable and well-described methodology. A suitable methodology is one that considers at least the following two questions: Does your methodology suit your research question? Is it doable within the time that you have? A good methodology section should state the procedures that you used to collect and analyse your data. A description of your participant(s)/data source(s) is also essential.
5. An understanding of the literature (previous research) on your topic. Where appropriate [this can be in any section of your paper], you should support your ideas/methods/analyses with relevant citations/references. You should remember to include appropriate reference information (use the APA).
6. Presentation, analysis, and discussion of results. If you use tables/charts/figures etc., be sure to explain and describe them. You should use appropriate examples from your data to support your analyses/claims. You can also cite literature to support your analyses.

Your paper should be written in the APA style. The current APA Manual (5th edition) is available in the library. Additionally, there are a number of web sources that provide information on the APA. One such website is the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (http://owl.english.purdue.edu).

In addition to the APA manual and the various websites, the course book discusses various aspects of writing-up your research project. It gives numerous tips and provides several examples of good report writing. Use this material/information to enhance your research report writing skills.

**Note:**

- Remember to include a word count at the end of your draft.
- Use Times New Roman- font size 12, double-spaced.
- The bibliography and appendices are NOT included in the word limit.
Non-research project tasks

1. WebCT online quizzes – 15 pts

There will be short online quizzes that you will be required to take after you have finished reading the chapter of the Stockwell book for the week. These quizzes will include 5 short questions and/or MCQs. The format of the quiz might change over the semester, but they should not take you more than 3-5 minutes each week. The combined score on these quizzes will account for 15% of the final grade.

Weekly quizzes will open and close at 7 pm on Mondays. They will be based on the first listed reading each week – and must be completed before you come to the lecture. You will have one week to complete each quiz. Each quiz will contain five short/MCQ items. You will need to score 4 points to pass each quiz (80%). If you do not achieve this score, you may retake the quiz (after a gap of 2 hours). You are allowed unlimited attempts. Each quiz that you pass will give you 1 pt towards your final grade.

There will be a final WebCT quiz that will include items from all quizzes. This quiz will be due on October 27th. The final quiz will contain 20 items. Again, you will be allowed unlimited attempts to achieve a passing score of 16 pts. Successful completion of this quiz will contribute 5 pts towards your final grade.

The weekly and final quizzes are designed as formative assessment tools. The purpose of this assessment is to help you achieve your learning goals. The quizzes are based on the core textbook and focus on key terms and concepts that we want you to remember from your readings. You may retake the quiz as many times as you like. In most cases, you will receive a new set of questions/answers each time you retake a quiz. In our experience, people find these quizzes very useful and use them to monitor their reading comprehension; sometimes they retake the quiz even though they pass it in an early attempt in order to make sure that they have got most of the information right. The quizzes also motivate people to keep up with the weekly readings and therefore better prepared for the lectures and assignments etc.

2. WebCT participation - 5 pts - Due October 27

The purpose of creating a web-discussion forum is to provide us with an opportunity to continue interesting discussions that we are unable to finish in the class, or to initiate other discussions that we are unable to hold during class time. We expect all of you to participate regularly on the Discussions Forum by initiating new discussion threads and responding to items posted by your colleagues.

Towards the end of this semester, you will need to select five of your postings (that best represent your work and contribution) and submit them to us for evaluation. Please include the date on which these were posted on WebCT. We will evaluate these postings based on the following criteria:

- Quality of submission: Are the postings well thought out and well organized? Do these postings contribute to the ongoing discussion?

- Time distribution: Are the selected postings distributed over time? (I want to see that you have contributed regularly over the semester. Submitting items in different folders on the same date will not be considered as satisfactory.)
Grade Descriptors

The following Grade Descriptors are to be read in conjunction with the specific criteria for each assignment. Taken together, these will indicate to you how we have gone about assessing your work.

High Distinction 85-100
Intelligent critical analysis of evidence;
Demonstrates high level of initiative in research and reading;
Impressive command of underlying debates and assumptions;
Properly documented;
Precise, clear writing;
All criteria addressed to a high level.

Distinction 75-84
Intelligent critical analysis of evidence;
Demonstrates initiative in research and reading;
Good command of underlying debates and assumptions;
Properly documented;
Precise, clear writing;
All criteria addressed clearly, and most to a high level.

Credit 65-74
Good analysis of evidence;
Demonstrates control of research and reading;
Shows an understanding of the underlying debates and assumptions;
Properly documented;
Precise, clear writing, with few grammatical errors;
All criteria addressed clearly.

Pass 50-64
Satisfactory analysis of evidence;
Demonstrates control of research and reading;
Properly documented;
Work is adequately written, with some grammatical errors;
Most criteria addressed adequately.

Fail 0-49
Work not of an acceptable standard
Most criteria not clearly or adequately addressed;
Written style inappropriate to task;
Major problems with expression.

Work may fail for any or all of the following reasons:
Failure to demonstrate understanding of content;
Irrelevance of content;
Unacceptable paraphrasing;
Absence of referencing where assignment requires this;
Unreadability (including major grammatical or structural problems);
Late submission without adequate explanation.
Academic Integrity

Part of learning to write in a scholarly way is learning how to refer to other people’s work. If you use other people’s work in your own work, you must acknowledge this properly. Not acknowledging the sources of the words and ideas that you use in your work is unacceptable in academic work, and is called plagiarism. The University has procedures for penalising students who do not follow principles of academic honesty. We ask you to read the University’s policy, which is available at:


If you have any questions, please either e-mail us or come and talk to us during our office hours.

Late submissions

The submission time for all assignments (unless otherwise stated in the syllabus document) is 5 pm, Monday. All assignments should include a completed cover sheet and should be placed in my assignment drop box on the 2nd floor of the Transient Building. Assignments submitted during/after the Monday night lectures may attract a penalty of 5% of the full marks of the assignment.

All assignments must be submitted on time, unless you have requested an extension from the lecturer/tutor in advance. If you have been given an extension, please attach a print out of the e-mail confirming the extension from the lecturer/tutor to your assignment.

Late work (submitted without an extension) is subject to penalty. Late work is penalised at the rate of 10% of the full marks of the assignment per day. The maximum penalty for any assessment will be 100%.