



Missouri Western State University  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Department of English, Foreign Languages and Journalism

## ENG 232: Language Awareness

Section 01 - TR 11:00-12:20 - Murphy 109  
Spring 2008

Instructor: Dr. Bensyl  
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Office Hours: MW 9:00-10:00 am and F 9:00-12:00 pm and by appointment  
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### Course Philosophy and Objectives

"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master--that's all."

-- Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

The English language is nobody's special property.

-- Derek Walcott, *Writers at Work*

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin, / Which melts like kisses from a female mouth.

-- Lord Byron, *Beppo*

"You taught me language; and my profit on 't / Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you, / For learning me your language!"

-- Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Are you convinced your dog understands you when you talk to her? Do you think you have an "accent" or think that other people "talk funny"? Do you wonder how young children acquire language long before they can tie their own shoes? Are you interested in extraterrestrial communication? Do you enjoy the witty wordplay in cartoons? These are just some of the topics that we cover in ENG232, an introductory linguistics course. Linguistics is about more than just theories about language's roots, structures, and functions; it's about the essential place of language in our lives. Language is fun. This class is designed to show you just how cool (as in California *kewl*) the study of language can be. Come with questions--leave with answers! Over the course of the semester, we will

- study linguists' theories about the roots, acquisition, nature, and functions of language
- learn about the sounds, structures, and symbols of language
- debate issues of language in relation to speech communities, culture, and gender
- explore constructed languages and attempts at interspecies and extraterrestrial communication
- examine the current state of language and its future

understand and appreciate linguistic variety.

## Required Materials

Textbook:

- Clark, Virginia P., Paul A. Eschholz and Alfred F., eds. Rosa. *Language: Readings in Language and Culture*. Sixth Edition. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. [Make sure it is the 6th edition--not the new 7th!]
- Thomas, Lee and Stephen Tchudi. *The English Language: An Owner's Manual*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999.

Other:

- Access to a good Collegiate Dictionary, like the fourth edition of *The American Heritage College Dictionary*
- A Computer flash drive or CD-RWs
- Photocopies of various sources
- Pocket folder for turning in Etymology Report

## Assignments

### Daily Assignments and Quizzes

Daily assignments include answering questions about the readings, doing field research, learning to divide language into its components, and creating messages to send to other worlds. Some activities will extend beyond class time and require work outside of class. The reading questions and activities will highlight the important points from our readings and will help you prepare for the final exam. There will be frequent (read: pretty much daily) quizzes over the reading assignments. Quizzes cannot be made up. They will be done on WebCT, during the first ten minutes of the class hour.

### Etymology Report

We will write a one page (~500 words) paper that reports on the history of a basic word as it developed from its Indo-European root to its modern usage using the the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Papers will use internal MLA documentation for citation.

### Final Exam

The Final Exam will will be drawn from the readings, films, lectures, activities, discussions, and quizzes. The exam will be done on WebCT, just like most of the quizzes were. You will be given some indication on a day-to-day basis of the kinds of knowledge you will need to retain for the final exam, as well as a study guide late in the semester to help you prepare for the knowledge portion of the exam. The best preparation, though, comes daily, by taking good notes and by reviewing those notes often. **If you have an A-average going into the Final Exam OR you are satisfied with your overall course grade, you may opt out of taking the Final Exam.**

### Have Fun

And I mean it. Don't let academic sounding essay titles like "Developmental Milestones in Motor and Language Development" discourage you! Even the most abstruse essay contains some fascinating bits of language lore that we will enjoy testing, debating, mangling, and dismantling. And while technical jargon will be required learning, *really, really, really* technical jargon will merely be bandied about in class in the spirit of "so *that's* what that's called!" and "hmm, isn't that interesting?" and "geez, who'd have thought?"

## Grading

Over the course of the semester, you will read a variety of essays about language and linguistics. In addition to the readings and quizzes, you will do a number of daily assignments and quizzes, write an OED report, and take a final exam. The quality of your work, the percentage of the work that you complete, and your efforts at participation will determine your final grade.

Your Final Grade Distribution is as follows, if you choose to take the Final Exam:

- Daily Assignments and Quizzes = 50%
- Etymology Report = 10%
- Final Exam = 40%

Your Final Grade Distribution is as follows, if you choose NOT to take the Final Exam:

- Daily Assignments and Quizzes = 90%
- Etymology Report = 10%

## Other Requirements

## Attendance and Promptness

Attendance is mandatory. School functions, illness, and personal crisis do not absolve you from your classroom obligations, so while due consideration is given to the student struck by lightning on the way to class, an absence cannot be designated as "excused" or "unexcused"--it simply "is." I consider two absences to be reasonable, but keep in mind that any absence can affect your final grade, as you are not here to take quizzes, participate, or turn in your work. Chronic lateness will count toward this total.

Regular attendance is an essential part of the student's educational experience and a requirement for an adequate evaluation of student academic progress. You are responsible for material covered or assignments given which you missed because of absence. All out-of-class assignments are due at the beginning of the class period. No quizzes can be made up or late assignments accepted unless you have a well-documented emergency.

You should note, however, that mere attendance does not mean you will pass the course. You must perform adequately on the tasks required and show initiative in completing the course requirements.

As some of you know, in order to improve student learning as well as to achieve compliance with federal financial aid policies, Western has a mandatory attendance policy for all 100 and 200 level courses. The University allows you an excused absence when acting as an official representative of the university, provided you give prior written verification from the faculty/staff supervisor of the event. All other absences will be deemed unexcused. **The maximum number of unexcused absences allowed for this class before the midterm report is three (based on our twice per week meeting schedule). Thus, when you have four unexcused absences I must report you to the Registrar's Office, who will automatically withdraw you from this class.** The Financial Aid Office will reduce financial aid as appropriate.

## Participation And Preparation

You are expected to make significant contributions to the class in the form of participation and preparation. Participation includes the oral contributions you make and your efforts to be a part of our discourse community. Preparation includes doing the daily readings and assignments, as well as engaging exuberantly in our activities. Keep in mind that live classroom discussion

- gives you practice arguing with others respectfully and professionally
- gives you opportunities to formulate applications of principles
- gives you prompt feedback on difficult or confusing issues and material
- increases your retention of material through explaining, summarizing, and questioning.

## Sharing Your Work

Students are expected to share their writings and other work with members of the course, and all work that a student produces may be shared by the instructor with the class for purposes of example and training. Such work will be as anonymous as possible. Finally, the instructor may share your work anonymously with future classes or in her own writing and research.

## Classroom Courtesy

Practice courteous and respectful exchanges. We, as students of language, should be particularly careful to note how tone and language contribute to the overall impression of our words. The University expects all students to conduct themselves so as to maintain an effective environment for learning, to act responsibly in accordance with good taste, and to respect fully the rights of others.

## Student Disability

Any student in this course who has a disability that prevents the fullest expression of abilities must contact me during the first week so that we can discuss class requirements.

## Late Work

All assignments are due at the beginning of the hour on the due date, unless otherwise specified. Learning is a cumulative process and each assignment in this course is designed to build on the last assignment; therefore, late work disrupts this important aspect of the learning process. **Therefore, no daily work will be accepted late and quizzes can not be made up or started late without a well-documented emergency. The OED report has a grace period of NO MORE THAN 24 hours from the due date/time for technical difficulties.** No work will be accepted after the last class day before the final exam.

## Computer Usage

You will be called upon to read some materials online, use WebCT, and utilize computers in and outside of class time. Your OED Report must be word processed in MSWord.

## University Academic Honesty Policy and Due Process

Academic honesty is required in all academic endeavors. Violations of academic honesty include any instance of plagiarism, cheating, seeking credit for another's work, falsifying documents or academic records, or any other fraudulent activity. Violations of academic honesty may result in a failing grade on the assignment, failure in the course, or expulsion from the University. When a student's grade has been affected, violations of

academic honesty will be reported to the Provost or designated representative on the Academic Honesty Violation Report forms.

Please see the 2006-07 Student Handbook and Calendar on page 21 for specific activities identified as violations of this policy and the student due process procedure. This handbook is also available online at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/handbook/index.pdf>

## Course Policy on Academic Honesty

. . . it is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation. -- Herman Melville

Plagiarism is literally the stealing of others' words and ideas and using them as your own. Make every effort to give credit where credit is due, and if you are not sure of "how"--ask. You are responsible for proving that all work turned in for grading is your own original work. Work with evidence of plagiarism, intentional or not, will receive a zero and may result in failure of the course. Students who cheat on a quiz or the final exam will receive zero for that activity and it may result in failure of the course. Further, all incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the the Provost as required by the official University policy and may result in additional consequences for the student.

## Final Thoughts

Despite Einstein's assurances that even the motions of dust motes have pattern, life to us mere mortals is unpredictable. I recognize that at times your outside life may interfere with your classroom life. It is up to you to set your priorities and to realize that "doing it all" is not always possible or even desirable. If you are feeling overly stressed about all you have to accomplish, you need to come see me.

## Course Schedule

### Introduction to Language

January

15 (T)

Introduction to the Course

Film: *Discovering the Human Language*

17 (Th)

Reading for Class: *Owner's Manual* pp 31-44

22 (T)

Reading for Class: Daniels' "Nine Ideas About Language" pp 43-60

### History of Language

24 (Th)

Film: *The Story of English, Part Two: The Mother Tongue*

[Assign Etymology Report](#)

29 (T)

Reading for Class: *Owner's Manual* pp 139-166

31 (Th)

Reading for class: Hughes' "Language and Writing" pp 705-722

### Language and Culture

February

5 (T)

Film: *American Tongues*

7 (Th)

Readings for class: *Owner's Manual* pp 277-306 and Roberts' "Speech Communities" pp 267-276

12 (T)

Reading for class: Smitherman's "'It Bees Dat Way Sometime': Sounds and Structures of Present Day Black English" pp 328-343

14 (Th)

Reading for class: Pfeiffer's "Girl Talk-Boy Talk" pp 357-364 and Tannen, "'I'll Explain It to You': Lecturing and Listening" pp 365-377

### Sounds and Structures in Language

19 (T)

Reading for class: *Owner's Manual* pp 50-57 and Callary's "Phonetics" pp 113-133

21 (Th)

Reading for class: Ohio State University Language Files' "The Minimal Units of Meaning: Morphemes" pp 134-143

26 (T) Francis' "Word-Making: Some Sources for New Words" pp 154-165

28 (Th) Library research—Etymology report

March

4 (T)

Reading for class: Jacobs and Rosenbaum's "What Do Native Speakers Know About Their Language?" pp 183-188

6 (Th) **Etymology Report Due**

March 9-16: Spring Break

(T)

Reading for class: *Owner's Manual* pp 205-237

(Th)

Reading for class: *Owner's Manual* pp 205-237

18 (T)

Reading for class: *Owner's Manual* pp 205-237

20 (Th)

Reading for class: Emmorey's "Sign Language" pp 79-95

Universal Grammar

25 (T)

Reading for class: Pinker's "The Tower of Babel" pp 240-256

27 (Th)

Film: *Star Trek Next Generation: Darmok*

Language Acquisition

April

1 (T) TBA

3 (Th) Film: *Acquiring the Human Language*

8 (T)

Reading for Class: Moskowitz's "The Acquisition of Language" pp 529-555

10 (T)

Reading for Class: Aitchison's "Predestinate Grooves: Is There a PreOrdained Language 'Program'?" pp 560-579

Animal Communication

15 (Th)

Film: *Signs of the Apes, Songs of the Whales*

17(T)

Reading for class: Kemp and Smith's "Signals, Signs, and Words: From Animal Communication to Language" pp 658-680 and Ohio State University Language Files' "True Language?" pp 74-77

22 (Th)

Film: *A Conversation with Koko*

24 (T)

Review for Final Exam

May

6 (T)

Final Exam 11:30 am - 1:20 pm