

## SS21 LIN 890 Independent Study

### *Sociolinguistic development across the lifespan*



**Meets:** Mondays, 4:30pm – 6:00pm on Teams  
**Instructor:** Dr. Suzanne Evans Wagner *and* Dr. Betsy Sneller  
**Office hours:** Wagner: [Book online here](#). Sneller: <https://msu.zoom.us/j/94784375562>, Tue 2-3  
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#### **Course description:**

This is a structured reading group on the topic of sociolinguistic development over the lifespan. ‘Structured’ means that the group is not totally informal, although certainly some participants will just sit in. On the other hand, enrolled participants are taking this as an independent study. This means that an expectation of the group is that enrollees will to some extent carve their own path through the literature, and will suggest additional optional papers to the group from their own background reading and interests. ‘Sociolinguistic development’, is an umbrella term that we’ll use to cover everything from children’s acquisition of socially meaningful linguistic variation, to preadolescents’ calibration of their own variation to the community’s norms, to the advancement of ongoing community language change by youth, to participation in language change by adults. Fundamentally we’ll be interested in how individuals change in relation to their speech community.

The approach we’ll take will be mostly within what’s been called the ‘variationist sociolinguistics’ framework, which is quantitative, although some of our reading will take us into other approaches. For us, ‘linguistic variation’ means probabilistic distribution of semantically- and/or functionally-equivalent linguistic variants from all modules of human grammar (e.g. phonetics, syntax, lexicon), all language modalities (e.g. speech, text, gesture, sign) and to the extent possible, many different languages. ‘Language change’ means changes within a language or dialect over time at the community level.

#### **Course objectives:**

*Everyone:*

- Get a broad overview of how age has been operationalized in variationist sociolinguistics (age, age group, generation, cohort etc).
- Be familiar with some landmark studies of age and language change in variationist sociolinguistics.
- Gain some exposure to the most recent sociolinguistic research on sociolinguistic development.

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- Understand how variationist studies of sociolinguistic development at points in the lifespan connect to broader questions about the nature and mechanisms of language change.
- Appreciate the intersectional nature of age as a concept i.e. how it is complicated by gender, style, social class etc.
- Get a sense of how the papers link to each other, as well as to other scholarship that you know.

*Additional objectives for those taking the course for credit:*

- Consolidate your grasp of a specific area of expertise in age-associated variation and change (see below).
- Have top-notch professional skills in bibliographic search, and in using social media to keep up with new ideas, publications and trends in the field.
- Develop good proficiency in (i) concisely and engagingly synthesizing a complex paper into a handout and a 20-minute verbal summary and (ii) contributing confidently and thoughtfully to group discussion.

**Required text:** There is no required text. Readings will be posted on Teams.

### Ensuring your success

Be professional. Whether or not you're joining this group for course credit, please treat it as a site of intellectual advancement. We'll keep the atmosphere informal, but this doesn't mean we're unserious. If you're taking it for credit, let me know if you'll be late or absent, and treat deadlines with respect.

Take notes. Each week, one of the group will share a handout. This will be a valuable resource for your own library. But to really get something out of this group, I recommend that you take notes as well. All kinds of things will come up in discussion that are not in the handout! Some of them might prove to be the germ of an idea that you will later want to pursue.

Be sensitive and respectful. In sociolinguistics, we often end up discussing issues which may be controversial. In order to create an environment that is supportive, inclusive, and intellectually stimulating, individual students must feel that their voices are heard and respected. Every person is responsible for their language and interactions, and should show regard for others while valuing free speech.

### Requirements and grading

#### 3-credit option

20%	Contributions to discussion
20%	Present Paper 1
20%	Present Paper 2
10%	Attendance
30%	Topic-oriented literature review

#### 2-credit option

20%	Contributions to discussion
30%	Present a paper
20%	Attendance
30%	Annotated bibliography

NOTE: Talk to us if you're interested in a 1-credit option.

Scale:	4.0	90-100	3.0	80-84	2.0	70-74	1.0	60-64
	3.5	85-89	2.5	75-79	1.5	65-69	0.0	0-59

**Presentation:** You will provide a 20-minute overview of a paper, supported by a 2-4 page handout. In most cases, you'll want to include the main question with brief reference to any important prior literature, a description of the speech community, the method, the results and conclusions. Your format will vary depending on the paper. The most important thing is to *synthesize*. Treat each of these presentations like a conference talk. What does your audience already know? What don't they know? What is essential to the overview, and what you leave out (but perhaps raise in the following discussion)? Does the audience need a blow-by-blow, painfully boring walk through the entire paper, or can you focus our attention on the parts that are most novel/exciting/interesting/problematic?

In short, you need to actually read the paper properly, all the way through, at least once *before you take any notes or start making your handout*. This will give you a sense of the overall paper, and prevent you from getting lost in the details.

**Contributions to discussion:** Good discussions are inclusive and lively. Ask questions of the presenter. Consider asking other participants –if you think they have relevant expertise or experiences—what they think. Feel confident about taking the conversational floor, but know when to offer it to others. Wherever possible, link the paper under discussion to other scholarship you know, or papers we've discussed.

**Annotated bibliography (2 credit only):** You will compile a bibliography in your sub-area of expertise, comprising about 10 sources, of which no more than 50% can be papers we've read in the group. You'll provide a brief summary of each citation, along with brief discussion/critique.

**Topic-oriented literature review (3 credit only):** You will write a synthesis of the literature on a subtopic from the reading group. No more than 50% can be papers we've read in the group. It cannot be a series of paragraph-long summaries. It must include some sense of how the literature fits together to form a bigger picture, what still needs to be understood, and why the subtopic is important.

### Other important information



Basic needs. Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the University's division of Student Affairs and Services (<http://studentaffairs.msu.edu/>) for support. Furthermore, please notify us if you are comfortable in doing so.



Accommodation for disability. Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [rcpd.msu.edu](http://rcpd.msu.edu). Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.



Lateness and make-ups. If you know you will regularly arrive late to our group or leave early, because of scheduling clashes with another class, please let us know at the start of the semester. Attendance is expected for students who have joined the group for credit (see above).



**Limits to confidentiality.** Materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues based on external legal obligations or that relate to the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices if you share it with me: (i) Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child, (ii) Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and (iii) Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others. These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center.



**Concerns.** The Chair of the Department of Linguistics and Languages is always available to hear any concerns you might have about this course. See <http://linglang.msu.edu/staff> for contact details. The Office of the University Ombudsperson is also available to assist students with any conflict or problem that has to do with being a student at Michigan State University. You may visit the Ombudsperson in 129 North Kedzie, call (517) 353-8830 or e-mail [ombud@msu.edu](mailto:ombud@msu.edu). The Office of the University Ombudsperson is an independent, neutral, informal and confidential resource and does not accept formal complaints, nor does it provide notice to the University.

## Schedule

- Jan 18      ***Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. NO MEETING***  
Post your intro video or text to Teams  
Asynchronous discussion of some background literature on age and time.
- Feb 1      **Age grading**  
Wagner, Suzanne Evans. 2012. Age grading in sociolinguistic theory. [\*Language and Linguistics Compass\* 6\(6\). 371–382.](#)  
  
Sankoff, G., & Wagner, S. E. (2020). The long tail of language change: A trend and panel study of Québécois French futures. [\*Canadian Journal of Linguistics\*, 65\(2\), 246–275.](#)
- Feb 15      **Children's acquisition of variation and change**  
Smith, J., Durham, M., & Fortune, L. (2007). "Mam, my trousers is fa'in doon!": Community, caregiver, and child in the acquisition of variation in a Scottish dialect. [\*Language Variation and Change\*, 19\(1\), 63–99.](#)  
  
Miller, Karen. 2013. Acquisition of variable rules: /s/-lenition in the speech of Chilean Spanish-speaking children and their caregivers. [\*Language Variation and Change\* 25\(3\). 311–340.](#)
- Mar 1      **Pre-adolescent calibration**  
Holmes-Elliott, Sophie. 2020. Calibrate to innovate: Community age vectors and the real time incrementation of language change. [\*Language in Society\*, FirstView.](#)

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Eckert, Penelope. 2011. Language and power in the preadolescent heterosexual market. [\*American Speech\* 86\(1\). 85–97.](#)

Also recommended (short!):

Eckert, Penelope. 2010. Affect, sound symbolism, and variation. [\*University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics\* 15\(2\). 70–80.](#)

Mar 15      **Adolescent incrementation**

Eckert: Jocks and Burnouts, paper TBD. [Link to 1989 ebook.](#)

Denis, Derek, Matt Hunt Gardner, Marisa Brook & Sali A. Tagliamonte. 2019. Peaks and arrowheads of vernacular reorganization. [\*Language Variation and Change\* 31\(1\). 43–67.](#)

Mar 29      **Adult lifespan change**

Mackenzie, Laurel. 2017. Frequency effects over the lifespan: a case study of Attenborough's r's. [\*Linguistics Vanguard\* 1–12.](#)

Harrington et al: Queen Elizabeth II, paper TBD.

Apr 12      **The cutting edge & wrap up**

Elena Sheard (Australia National University) – current work.

Deadline for submission of bibliographies and literature reviews: April 26<sup>th</sup>.