

Today's topics:

- **Introduction to this course**
- **What is linguistics?**

0. Getting oriented with Zoom

- Welcome to LING 101! While we're waiting for class to start, see if you can do these things on Zoom:
 - Turn the "Participants" list view on and off
 - Turn the "Chat" list view on and off
 - Mute and unmute your microphone
- During class:
 - Turning your **camera** on is **optional**
 - Please **mute** your **microphone** unless you want to **talk**
 - Use the **chat** to ask and answer **questions**

***** Always join Zoom via unc.zoom.us *****

***** and log in with [...]@email.unc.edu *****

1. Course information

Welcome!

- Professor: **Jennifer Smith** [[my web site](#)]
- Course structure:
 - M** — Zoom lecture [[LING 101 Zoom links and tips](#)]
 - Lecture outline (slides) also available
 - Recording with captions posted within about one day
 - W** — Self-paced learning [[info and schedule](#)]
 - F** — Recitations
 - Sakai and Zoom info for recitations: available soon

1. Course information

- Recitation leaders (TAs):

Leah Dudley	601	<i>face-to-face/hybrid</i> <i>remote for F Aug 14</i>
Dylan Elliott	602	
Ben Coleman	603	<i>remote synchronous</i>
Rebecca Winters	604	<i>remote asynchronous</i>
Jiefang Li	605	

- Do you need to **switch** recitations?
 - Use “Edit” in ConnectCarolina to change recs
 - No open seats in the rec you need? Keep trying, and I’ll check in with you all on Wednesday

1. Course information

- **Textbook:** *Contemporary Linguistics*, 7th ed. (CL)
 - Be sure you have the 7th edition (green)
- **Course web site:**
<https://users.castle.unc.edu/~jlsmith/ling101.html>
- Check the “**Daily syllabus**” page after every class to find out about new readings and assignments
 - Today’s entry has the “**Course info and policies**” handout — ***download and keep in a safe place***

*Remember to REFRESH your web browser
to get the latest version of a web page*

1. Course information

Some key course policies

- UNC [Community Standards](#)
 - Please **wear a mask** over your nose and mouth for face-to-face recitation meetings
 - If you have any [COVID symptoms](#) or have been exposed, please stay home! (Let your rec TA know if you need a remote alternative)
- See also the “[Course info and policies](#)” handout
 - Grading information
 - Exam dates ...and more

2. What is linguistics?

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Linguistics is
the study of language

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- What is language?

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

Language is a system of communication...

- But what are its properties?
- How is language *similar to* and *different from* other communication systems?

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

Language is **human** — animal communication \neq language

- ***Design features*** of language (Hockett 1960) include:
 - ***Displacement***: Can be about things that are removed in space and time, or don't exist
 - ***Arbitrariness*** (Saussure): No logical connection between sound and meaning
 - ***Productivity***: New thoughts can be expressed

“No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his parents were poor, but honest.”

— Bertrand Russell

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

Language is **universal**

- All humans acquire at least one language, given language input and normal development
 - Note: Sign languages are *languages*!
- In this course, we will discuss **child language acquisition**

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

Language is **social**

- The sounds, words, and structures that we use can signal our group membership or our identity

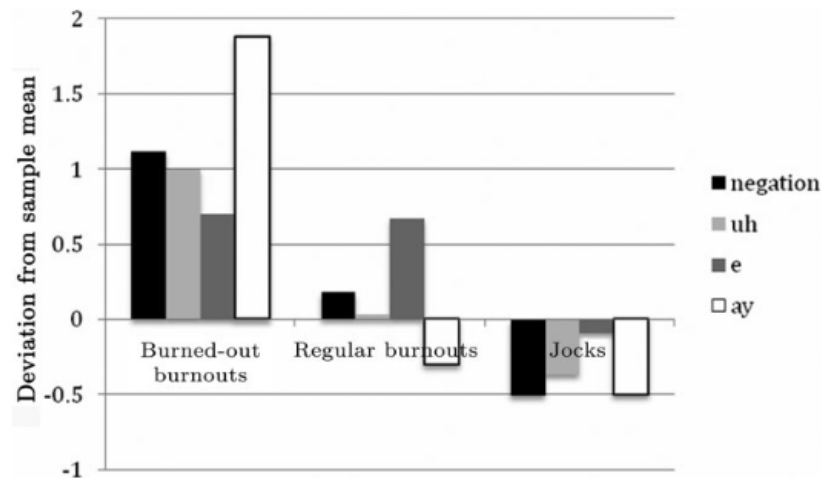


Figure 2

Use of vernacular variants by girls' subcategory. From Eckert (2000).

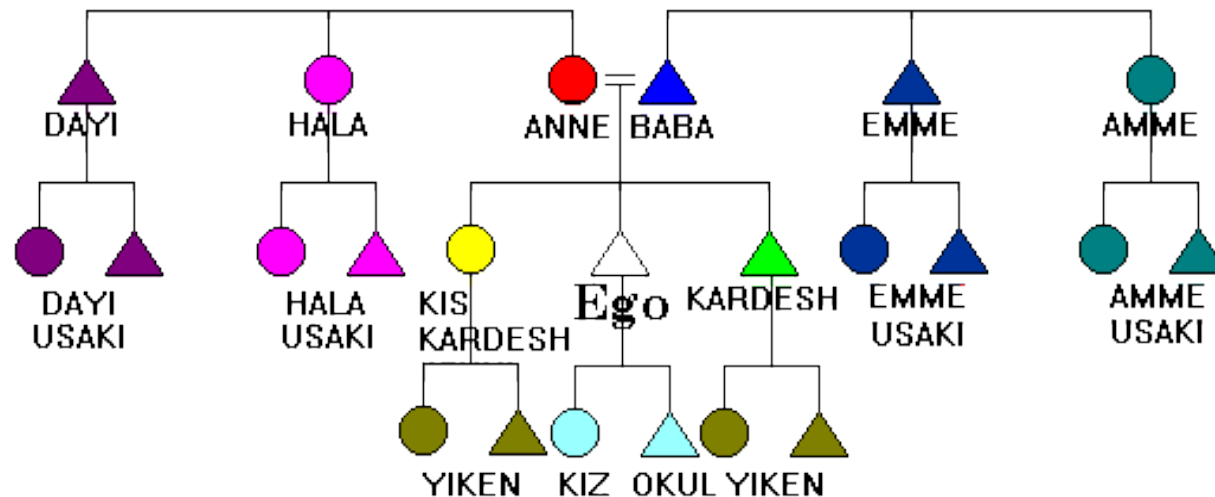
Vowel pronunciation and use of “double negatives” by Jocks and Burnouts in a Detroit high school (Eckert 2012)

- In this course, we will discuss **social aspects of language use**

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

Language is **cultural**

- Terms used by a society can provide information about the structure or interests of that society



Turkish kinship terms, by Brian Schwimmer

https://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/case_studies/turkish/turkterm.html

- We *won't* discuss cultural aspects very much in this course
→ see LING/ANTH 138, "Linguistic Anthropology"

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

Language is **biological**

- Appears to have a **critical period**
 - At least for first-language acquisition
- Proof of **genes** specifically for language?
 - Jury is still out (IMHO)
- A **main focus of this course** will be investigating the properties of a language system that a speaker has acquired **naturally** (not through instruction)

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** — but this doesn't mean what you might think

- What is *grammar*?

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** — but this doesn't mean what you might think

- Grammar: What people “should” say or write?

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** — but this doesn't mean what you might think

- Grammar: What people “should” say or write?
→ **Prescriptive** grammar
 - Useful for learning a foreign language, or learning a particular style (formal writing, ...)
 - NOT the focus of most research in linguistics

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Why** do most linguists *not* study prescriptive grammar?

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Why** do most linguists *not* study prescriptive grammar?
 - Remember from above...
We're interested in the properties of a language system that a speaker has acquired **naturally** (not through instruction)

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Descriptive** grammar
 - What people **do** say
- **Mental** grammar = **Linguistic competence**
 - “What do we know when we know a language?”
- Linguistics typically focuses on **descriptive** and **mental** grammars of **native speakers**
 - Native speaker: Someone who acquires a language from exposure, *as a small child*

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Descriptive** grammar
 - What people **do** say (and understand)
- **Mental** grammar = **Linguistic competence**
 - “What do we know when we know a language?”
- **Linguistics is a scientific approach to language**
 - Our data: What people say (and understand)
 - Using this data, we aspire to build a **model** of human mental grammar

4. What is mental grammar?

What do we know when we know a language?

- Much of mental grammar is **systematic** — **unconscious** “rules” / “principles”

Example: (rules not taught in school!)

- Who does *himself* refer to?
 - (a) Oscar admires *himself*.
 - (b) Oscar thinks that Grover admires *himself*.

4. What is mental grammar?

- English speakers agree:
 - (a) ***Oscar** admires **himself**.*
 - (b) *Oscar thinks that **Grover** admires **himself**.*
- **Why** Grover, and *not* Oscar, in (b)?
 - Can you form a hypothesis?

4. What is mental grammar?

- Now who does *himself* refer to?
 - (c) *Oscar told Grover stories about **himself**.*
- Does your hypothesis make the right prediction?

4. What is mental grammar?

- Two possible meanings this time!
 - (c) **Oscar** told Grover stories about **himself**.
Oscar told **Grover** stories about **himself**.
- What this example shows us:
 - English native speakers largely agree, even though they were not “taught” how to use *himself*
 - The mental grammar contains some systematic principle
 - But what is the principle? *Himself* doesn’t simply refer to the closest preceding option, given (c)...
- Later in the course, we’ll solve this puzzle

4. What is mental grammar?

More evidence for mental grammar:

- Children make **systematic** “mistakes” while acquiring their language
- Human language is creative (**productive**)
 - We can produce and understand novel words/phrases/sentences
 - A mental grammar is more than just a memorized list

4. What is mental grammar?

- **Spoken language**, rather than written, is most reflective of mental grammar
 - Writing is often crafted (although “spontaneous” writing is more like speech)
 - Not all societies have written language, but all have spoken (or signed) language

4. What is mental grammar?

- Why is mental grammar worth studying?
 - Better understanding of human language(s)
 - Insight into nature of human mind/brain
- The world's languages are **diverse** in many ways
- But there are also strong **similarities** in the rules of mental grammar from language to language
- Linguists aim to develop a theory of mental grammar that can account for both the **differences** and the **similarities**

5. Getting ready for the next class

- Visit the [Daily Syllabus page](#) on the course web site
- Remember to join Zoom securely!
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