Language, Religion, and Ethnicity

Class code: FRSEM-UA 627-001 (20760)

Instructor Details
Professor Benjamin Hary
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Office: TBA

Class Details
Language, Religion, and Ethnicity
Time: Tuesdays 11:00–1:30
Place: TBA

Prerequisites
No prerequisites

Class Description
This is a first-year seminar asking fundamental questions such as: What is a language? What is religion? What is ethnicity? And above all, what is the connection between them? The seminar offers a linguistic view of religion and ethnicity and looks into the sociolinguistic history, society, and culture of the United States as well as other case studies.

We will consider the great diversity of communicative systems we encounter both as a source of enrichment for individuals and the nation as a whole, and as a basis for problems, and will consider possible resolutions of these problems. In addition, we will study the universal phenomenon of language change and how it affects our understanding of language behavior religiously and ethnically.

Students will be introduced to basic concepts of linguistics with an emphasis on descriptive linguistics and sociolinguistics. Students will be exposed to sociolinguistic methods to examine the relationship between language and religion, language and nationalism, language and power, language and ethnicity, language and gender, and language and education.

The course includes lectures, discussions, recitations and a field trip.

Desired Outcomes
After taking this course, you will have basic knowledge in

- the concepts of language, dialect, sociolect, religiolect, ethnolect
- the varieties of languages and dialects
- the mechanism of language change
- the International Phonetic Alphabet and its application to American English
- the concepts of religion and ethnicity and their relations to language
- the notion of religiolect, including Jewish English; Muslim English and Christianese (=Christian English)

Assessment Components
- Students are expected to attend class regularly and arrive in class on time. Students must complete all assigned readings before the class meeting and be prepared to participate actively in discussions of the readings. They are also expected to attend a few out-of-class activities, including a possible field trip. There will be further readings for extra credit.
- Students are required to turn in all written assignments on the dates scheduled. Late work will
not be accepted.

- Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

**Requirements:**

1) Two **tests** and possible announced (short) **quizzes** (25%)
2) Three **three-page assignments** (20%)
3) An **in-class oral presentation** on the readings (10%)
4) Active **participation** in class discussions (5%)
5) An **abstract** (one page) of the intended writing project (10%)
6) A **writing project** (10 pages) to be determined with the instructor (30%)

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** Active participation, excellent oral and written work, originality of thought

**Grade B:** Active participation, good oral and written work

**Grade C:** Active participation, complete oral and written work

**Grade D:** Participation, complete oral and written work

**Grade F:** Incomplete participation or work

**Grade conversion**

A=94-100
A-=90-93
B+=87-89
B=84-86
B-=80-83
C+=77-79
C=74-76
C-=70-73
D+=67-69
D=65-66
F=below 65

**Grading Policy**

No-shows for presentations in class and assignments due after the deadline without requesting an extension may receive zero grades.

**NYU Policy on Religious Holidays**

1. Students who anticipate being absent because of any religious observance should, whenever possible, notify the instructor in advance of such anticipated absence.

2. Whenever feasible, examinations and assignment deadlines should not be scheduled on religious holidays. Any student absent from class because of his/her religious beliefs shall not be penalized for any class, examination, or assignment deadline missed on that day or days. In the event that examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on a religious holiday, any student who is unable to attend class shall be permitted the opportunity to make up any examination or to extend any assignment deadline missed on that day or days.

3. That no adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student who avails him/herself of the provisions of the resolution.

4. A violation of these policies and principles shall permit any aggrieved student to bring forward a grievance, provided under the University Grievance Procedure.

**Late Submission of Work**

All works must be submitted on time unless you have received an explicit extension. Any late submission may result in grade deduction at the sole discretion of the instructor.
Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarism constitutes an academic offence for which you can be disciplined. Punishment may include a failing grade, suspension or expulsion. In all confirmed cases, a report will be sent to the student’s Dean.

Required Text(s)

Selected chapters from:

Additional selected chapters and articles from the bibliographical list at the end of the syllabus. Some readings are optional and strongly recommended.

Internet Research Guidelines

It is hard to overestimate the importance of the internet to the build up of contemporary knowledge of the world around us. But it needs to be used wisely. This means that one must be selective and careful when relating to internet-based sources, identifying and distinguishing opinions from facts, and journalism from academics. One should make clear reference to internet sources, allowing the reader the opportunity to consult these resources as and if required. As with all sources of information, use the internet critically.

Please also note that the ‘world-wide web’ – www – exists in many languages. Many sources about language, for instance, will be aimed at the general public and, as noted above, you need to develop critical skills to differentiate between myths and academic arguments.
Week 1

September 4

What is Linguistics and what is Sociolinguistics?
What are languages, dialects, religiolects, and ethnolects?
What is “correct” language?
Speech varieties

Readings:
Yule, chapter 18, pp. 264–282.

Week 2

September 11

English in New York City and in the US
Migration and Language

Film:
Do you speak American?

Assignment:
Think of 10 characteristics that distinguish your own English; if you are not a native speaker of English, think of specific characteristics that distinguish your own language

Readings:

Week 3

September 18

What is Religion? What is Ethnicity?
What is their connection to language?

Film:
Video to be shown in class: Saturday Night Live – Leslie Jones and Louis C.K. – This is How I Talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8PXvqYpGCM

Readings:
Joseph, chapters 1 and 3, pp. 1–14 and 41–66.
Assignment I is due: Linguistic Autobiography

Make-up session

Sunday, September 23

Field Trip: Immigration and Language in New York City

Week 4

September 25

The history of English
The disciplines of linguistics
Introduction to IPA

Film:
The Story of English, Part 3: A Muse of Fire

Week 5

October 2
The sounds of language; IPA and its application to English

Readings: Yule, chapters 3–4 (chapters 5–7 are optional).

Week 6

October 16
Language change: How does it happen? Does it have to happen? Why do we view it so negatively? How do linguists analyze it?

Readings: McWhorter, chapters 1–2, pp. 7–58; Yule, chapter 17, pp. 251–267.
3-page Assignment II is due: Phonetic Transcription

Week 7

October 23
Review
Test 1

Week 8

October 30
Language and Ethnicity: African American Vernacular English (Black English)

Film:
The Story of English, Part 5: Black on White

Broadcast:
The Blaccent: What Does It Mean to Sound Black? (John McWhorter on Lexicon Valley (episode 84)


Week 9

November 6
Language and Religion: The Jewish Linguistic Spectrum (Jewish English in New York City)


**Week 10**

**November 13**

Language and Religion II: Application to Christian and Muslim language varieties

**Readings:**


**Students Presentations:**


Christianese on the Square [2 students]

Abstract of your writing project is due

**Week 11**

**November 20**

Language and Religion III: Christian and Muslim identities in Lebanon

**Readings:**


**Students Presentations:**

Language and Religion in Lebanon [2 students]

Assignment III is due: Linguistic Interview

**Week 12**

**November 27**

No class

**Week 13**

**December 4**

**Student Presentations:** American English Varieties

AAVE in the US/NYC [3 students] (recommended: McWhorter, chapters 7–8)

Spanglish in the US/NYC [3 students]
Readings:

Test 2

Week 14

December 11
Language, Politics and Power; Language and Conflict

Readings:

Students Presentations:
The language war in the US; language and conflict in the Middle East [3 students]

Summary and conclusions of Language, Religion and Ethnicity

Writing project is due on December 21, 2018

Classroom Etiquette

Please turn off all cell phones in class. Do not use computers unless directly related to class work.

Your Instructor

I am a Professor at the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies and the Director of NYU Tel Aviv. In the Fall of 2018 I will be teaching you on the Square. Until 2014 I was a Professor of Hebrew, Arabic, and Linguistics and the Director of the Program in Linguistics at Emory University. I am the author of Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic (1992), Translating Religion (2009) and Daily Life in Israel (2012, with R. Adler). I am also the editor and co-editor of Judaism and Islam (2000), Corpus Linguistics and Modern Hebrew (2003), and Esoteric and Exoteric Aspects in Judeo-Arabic Culture in 2006. I also published over 50 articles and book reviews on Judeo-Arabic, as well as Arabic and Hebrew linguistics, and has lectured widely in Europe, Israel, Egypt and North America.

My research concentrates on Language and Religion, including Jewish language varieties in general and Judeo-Arabic in particular, Jews in the Islamic world, politics of Arabic language use in Israeli society, corpus linguistics, Language and ethnicity, dialectology, and sociolinguistics. I have recently focused my research on issues such as why and how Jews (and for that matter, Christians and Muslims as well) speak and write differently from people who are not Jews (or Christians and Muslims). I am working now on completing my book, Sacred Texts in Egyptian Judeo-Arabic; my co-edited volume, Languages in Jewish Communities, Past and Present (Berlin: E. J. Verlag Walter de Gruyter) will appear this year. I am a strong believer in Global Education. During my career I created semester programs in Israel, Prague and Istanbul and summer programs touring Europe and Israel while developing a “hands-on” method to teach language use and history on location. I am currently the Director of NYU Tel Aviv using all these methods there.
The following bibliography is important for our seminar. You will be asked to read selected chapters from the following list; some readings are recommended and you will probably use other readings to guide you through in your assignments and in your final project.


O’Grady et al. Contemporary Linguistics.

