Linguistics 338 – African American English
Reed College, Fall 2015
T/TH 1:10-2:30, PAB 105

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-4pm, Wednesdays 10am-12pm, and by appointment

Prerequisites
Linguistics 211 and 212, or consent of instructor.

Course Description

The variety currently known as African American English (AAE) is perhaps the most studied by sociolinguists yet remains the least understood by U.S. residents. This course covers the history, linguistic structure, and socio-cultural patterns of use of the English of African Americans in the United States. We will use the concept of strategic essentialism to understand the context for and history of AAE scholarship. We will take a variationist approach to African American English features, focusing on the phonology and morphosyntax that is considered unique to AAE, and discussing lexical and discursive features as well. We will cover the major debates that continue to rage in AAE scholarship – the Origins controversy and the related Divergence/Convergence debate – and engage with contemporary critiques of AAE scholarship. Finally, we will consider the relationship between AAE and hip hop, including issues of authenticity and appropriation, and explore the role of linguistics in debates over the use of AAE in education. (Fulfills Group B).

Course Texts

Additional articles will be posted in PDF on Moodle

Grading

1. Assignments (60%)
   Three assignments during the semester will ask you to conduct a variationist quantitative analysis of some feature of AAE.

   Assignment 1: Copula absence
   Assignment 2: /ai/ monophthongization
   Assignment 3: -t/d deletion

2. Final Paper: (20%)
   Your final paper will be a 3-5-page response to one from a set of prompts that I will provide.

3. Participation: (20%)
   Participation in conference is mandatory and crucial to the success of our class, particularly at the upper division. Engage in class in a way that demonstrates the effort you put in to our
class and our readings. Ask questions, connect concepts and readings, and clarify or expand on what others say in class.

I will expect you to come to class prepared with at least two substantive questions or comments for each reading for that day. If discussion isn’t flowing well, I may formalize your contributions by asking you to submit discussion questions in advance, or assign a rotation discussion leader.

In addition, I expect you to contribute artifacts that directly relate to our course material to the Sociolinguistic Artifacts website:
www.reed.edu/slx-artifacts

I expect you to contribute 2 artifacts across the course of the semester. You will receive extra credit on your participation grade for more frequent contributions.

Course Policies

On Absences: Regular, prepared and disciplined conferencing is intrinsic to this course. Once you have missed two weeks of class – whether or not your absences are excused – you will have missed too much material and will not receive credit for this course. If a condition is chronic, appropriate documentation and reasonable accommodations should be considered in consultation with both me and the Disability Support Services office. A notice from Student Services that are you are absent because of an illness or are taking a formal emergency absence does not mean that you are excused from meeting any of the requirements of this course. If you must be absent due to health or an emergency, it is your responsibility to catch up on missed material.

On Accommodations: If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodation for this class, it is your responsibility to contact and register with Disability Support Services and provide them with documentation of your disability, so that they can determine what accommodations are appropriate for your situation. With your permission they will discuss with me those reasonable and appropriate accommodations. To avoid any delay you should contact the DSS office as early as possible in the semester, and contact me for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs in this course. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and that reasonable disability accommodations cannot be provided until I have received an accommodation letter from and discussed your case with the DSS office. You can reach Disability Support Services at (503) 517-7921 or disability-services@reed.edu

On Incompletes: I don’t give them except in the case of an acute, extreme emergency or health crisis that interrupts what otherwise was good work in this course.

On Late Work/Extensions: You are entitled to one one-day extension on a due date in this course, no questions asked. After that, any late work drops a full letter grade for every 24 hours past the deadline.
Course Schedule

Week 1
September 1

September 3
2. Language in the Inner City, Introduction and Chapter 1.

Week 2
September 8
1. Language in the Inner City, Chapter 2 (all) and Chapter 3 (Sections 1, 2, 4, and 8 only)

September 10

Assignment 1 Distributed

Week 3
September 15

September 17

Further Reading:

Week 4
September 22
September 24

Further Reading:

Assignment 1 is due by midnight on Thursday, September 24th

Week 5
September 29

Assignment 2 is distributed

October 1
1. Language in the Inner City, Chapter 8, Rules for Ritual Insults

Week 6:
October 6
2. Language in the Inner City, Chapter 9, The transformation of experience in narrative syntax, pgs. 354-362, and 375-396.

Further Reading:

October 8
Week 7:
October 13
1. Language in the Inner City, Chapter 6, The relation of reading failure to peer group status

Further Reading:

October 15

Assignment 2 presentations. Assignment 2 is due by midnight on Thursday, October 15th.

Week 8: Happy Fall Break!

Week 9
October 27
1. Language in the Inner City, Chapter 7, the linguistic consequences of being a lame.

October 29

Week 10
November 3

Further Reading:

November 5

Assignment 3 Distributed
Week 11
November 10

November 12

Week 12
November 17

November 19
3. [http://www1.ucsc.edu/oncampus/currents/97-03-31/ebonics.htm](http://www1.ucsc.edu/oncampus/currents/97-03-31/ebonics.htm)

Week 13
November 24
*Assignment 3 presentations. Assignment 3 is due by midnight on Tuesday, November 24th*

November 26
Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 14
December 1

Further Reading:
December 3
1. Wheeler, Rebecca. 2006. “What do we do about student grammar – all those missing -
ed’s and –s’s?” Using comparison and contrast to teach Standard English in dialectally
1. Blake, Renee and Cecilia Cutler. 2003. AAE and variation in teachers’ attitudes: A

Week 15
December 8

Further Reading:
Thomas, Erik R. and Jeffrey Reaser. 2004. Delimiting perceptual cues used for the ethnic
labeling of African American and European American voices. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8 (1):
54-87.

Finals: Tuesday, December 15th by midnight