Language and Gender

Reed College
Fall 2012
Kara Becker

Linguistics 335
T/Th 1:10-2:30
Eliot 123
Office Hours, Vollum 125: Wednesdays, 2-4pm and by appointment
kbecker@reed.edu

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the large body of literature on Language and Gender within Sociolinguistics. Students will investigate how language in use mediates, and is mediated by, social constructions of gender and sexuality. Emphasis is placed on the history of research in language and gender, which contains distinct phases and movements in the field, and will culminate in a current discussion of the state of language and gender research today. Particular attention will be paid to the evolution of feminist theory, ideology, hegemony, performativity, and the “borders” of gender identities. Students will read scholarly articles and write data-driven research write-ups that clearly relate fieldwork experiences to language and gender theory. Conference.

Prerequisites: Ling 212, or consent of instructor. Group: B

Grading

1. Participation 25%

As always, participation – both in preparation for and during class discussion – is crucial to the success of our course. As this is a theory-heavy course for Linguistics, you should focus your energies on honing your critical thinking skills. We will do the following:

1. One week in advance, I will post one to two questions designed to help you focus your reading for the following week. I will also list key terms that I’d like you to be familiar with when you arrive in class.
2. 24 hours before class (*this is a firm deadline*), you will post 1-2 discussion questions for us to draw from in class discussion. Good discussion questions can be in formats like “I was fascinated by…” “I was confused by…” “I’d like to talk
more about…” “I wonder what the rest of you thought X meant when…” Your goal is to 1) clarify concepts and topics for yourself and others as well as 2) to aid our conference by fostering discussions that move us beyond the surface.

2. Assignments: 50%

Assignment 1: Labels

In this assignment we will work together to create an on-line survey exploring terms, and the reactions/perceptions of terms, related to gendered identities. Your write-up will not exceed 5 pages.

Assignment 2: Discourse

This assignment follows a fieldwork/analysis/write-up model. You will record the casual speech of friends and analyze this recording for discursive features that contribute to the construction of gender. Your final write-up cannot exceed 10 pages (excluding accompanying transcripts), and must connect your data to relevant literature from class.

Assignment 3: Acoustics

This assignment follows the fieldwork/analysis/write-up model, you will focus here on the acoustic correlates of gender identification and/or sexual orientation. Your final write-up cannot exceed 10 pages (excluding accompanying transcripts), and must connect your data to relevant literature from class. Max 10 pages.

4. Final Paper 25%

Your final paper will again be based on a fieldwork/analysis/write-up model, on a topic of your choosing. Max 10 pages.

Course Readings

Readings are available on Moodle and through the Library’s e-journals.

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 two 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 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 and timely progress in this course.

**On Late Work/Extensions:** Late work drops a full letter grade for every 24 hours past the deadline.

Course Schedule

**Week 1**  
Aug 28: Introductions  
Aug 30: Where it began  

**Week 2**  
Sep 4 - Learning to do gender  
2. Eckert, Penelope and Sally McConnell-Ginet. Chapter 1 from *Language and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sep 6: Data 1 – Labels
   Assignment 1 survey finalized

Week 3 – Women and Men in the Sociolinguistic Literature
Sep 11

Sep 13
   Assignment 1 survey data collected

Week 4 – Chasing “Women’s Language”
Sep 18

Sep 20: Power.

Week 5 – More on “Women” and “Men”
Sep 25

Sep 27 – Masculinity
*Assignment 1 due*

**Week 6: Masculinity and the unmarked**  
Oct 2
Oct 4

**Week 7 – Language and Sexuality (and Gender) – Gay Men’s Language**  
Oct 9
Oct 11

**Week 8: Fall Break**

**Week 9– Language and Sexuality (and Gender) cont.**  
Oct 23:
Oct 25: *Lab Day*
Week 10: Queer Talk
Oct 30

Nov. 1

Week 11
Nov 6
Nov 8

Week 12: Ideologies, Indexicalities
Nov 13

Nov 15

Week 13
Nov 20:
Nov 22: Turkey Day

Week 14: Gender, Sexuality, and Intersectionality
Nov 27
Nov 29

Assignment 3 is Due

Week 14
Dec 4: Last Day of Class

Final work is due Wednesday, December 12, at 5pm