# Linguistics 211/611b Spring 2014

# T, Th 1:00-2:15 Dow Hall 112

**Grammatical Diversity in U.S. English**

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 Office hours: by appointment

**Readings:**

We will be reading chapters from the following books:

*AE:*Walt Wolfram & Natalie Schilling-Estes (2006), *American English: Dialects and Variation,*

2d edition*.* Oxford: Blackwell.

 (Required, available at Yale Bookstore; we’ll be reading almost all of this text.)

*AAE (Green):*

Lisa J. Green (2002), *African American English.* Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press.

 (Recommended; we’ll be reading two chapters, which will be on the server.)

In addition, we’ll be assigning articles and book chapters posted in the Resources folder on classes\*v2.

**Course description:**

This course will take a natural language as the object of scientific investigation: English,
in its varieties encountered throughout the United States. We will focus not on the phonology (pronunciation) or lexicon (vocabulary and word choice) but on the syntax of these varieties, and will guide you through the discovery and analysis of some of the unusual properties of several constructions that you may not find familiar. Our aim is to raise your awareness of the systematic and rule-governed way in which related linguistic varieties (languages and dialects) differ from one another and to give you the opportunity to act as a social scientist: observing a pattern of behavior, generalizing over it, and forming and testing a hypothesis concerning the principles that govern it.

**Course requirements:**

1. All students in the class are expected to do the relevant readings and actively participate in class discussions.
2. Six to eight written assignments, consisting of either questions about the readings or exercises aiming at discovering a linguistic pattern.
3. A journal of dialect awareness, that is, a collection of observations you will make throughout the semester on non-standard features of English that you notice around you (in conversations you hear, pieces you read, song lyrics, etc.). We will collect these just before Spring Break to give you feedback, and at the very end of the term.
4. A final project, which will represent your own investigation of a grammatical phenomenon that characterizes a non-standard variety of English. You can work alone or with a classmate.

**Grade breakdown:**

1. Class participation (10%)
2. Written assignments (40%)
3. Journal of dialect awareness (20%)
4. Final project (30%)

**Course Policies:**

1. Cell phone use in class is prohibited.
2. Laptop use is prohibited.
3. It is essential that you **acknowledge your sources**, both in your writing and in your oral presentations. This is for several reasons (from the Princeton website on academic integrity: http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/pages/sources/):

•To distinguish your own work from that of your sources.

•To receive credit for the research you’ve done.

•To establish the credibility and authority of your knowledge and ideas.

•To place your own ideas in context, locating your work in the larger
intellectual conversation about your topic.

•To permit your reader to pursue your topic further by reading more about it.

•To permit your reader to check on your use of source material.

In the **Topics and primary readings** that follow, only the readings from the primary texts (above) are now listed; other readings will be filled in as we go. We’ll also be looking at a number of grammatical constructions that occur in some (but not all!) varieties of North American English, including (among others):

* *a*-prefixing
* positive *anymore*
* negative concord
* negative inversion
* habitual *be*
* zero copula
* personal datives
* “drama” *so*
* multiple modals
* *needs washed*
* *liketa.*

(How many of these constructions/expressions do you recognize by name?)

HINT: check out the “Phenomena” page at the *YGDP (Yale Grammatical Diversity Project)* web site, <http://microsyntax.sites.yale.edu/phenomena>.

**list of topics**

## I. Introduction to the study of dialect & linguistic variation

*AE, Chapters 1 and 2*

*Overview of course: goals and requirements*

*Languages, dialects, armies, and navies*

*Why is there variation? What are its sources?*

**II. Dialect variation: why, where, and whence?**

*AE, Chapters 3 and 4*

*Parameters of variation: pronunciation, grammar, lexicon, register*

*Phonetic transcription for English*

*Origins of variation: historical and sociological sources*

*Diversity and unity: “American Tongues” video*

**III. Regional variation**

*AE, Chapter 5*

*Maps and isoglosses: DARE and other resources*

*Settlement patterns, major dialect areas, rural outposts*

**IV. A grammar of regional variants**

*Pages from YGDP web site on the phenomena*

**V. Social and ethnic variation**

*AE, Chapter 6*

*Social class as a factor*

*Race/ethnicity as a factor*

*In-group and out-group identifiers*

February 27: Visit from John McWhorter

**** **SPRING BREAK** Mar. 10, 17

**VI. African American English**

*AE, Chapter 7*

*AAE (Green), Chapters 2 and 3*

*Origin and development of AAE (a.k.a. “Ebonics”)*

*Negative concord and negative inversion in AAE and other dialects*

*Variation and the notion of “correctness”*

**VII. Genderlects**

*AE, Chapter 8*

*Perceived and actual sex-based asymmetries in language use*

*Sex-based asymmetries in language structure*

*Sexual orientation and language use: is there a Gay English?*

**VIII. Stylistic variation**

*AE, Chapter 9*

*Idiolectal variation and code-switching*

*Social groups and communities of practice*

*Age-based variation in language use; slang and (in)formality: the case of* so

**IX. Class presentations**