



ENGCMP 1551, 20890

## History & Politics of the English Language

MW 3-4:15 pm, 213 CL

University of Pittsburgh, Spring 2012

Website: [www.annettevee.com/2012spring\\_engcmp1551](http://www.annettevee.com/2012spring_engcmp1551)

Prof. Annette Vee

628C Cathedral of Learning

Office hours: MW, 4:30-5:30pm

*...Ther is so great diversite  
In English, and in wryting of oure tonge,  
So prey I god that non myswrite thee...  
-Chaucer*

As a student at Pitt, you probably think you can speak and write the English language, right? But what does that mean? Does that mean you could write English that would be understood by someone in 17<sup>th</sup> century England? Does that mean you could speak English that would be accepted by speakers in English speakers in Mumbai, New York City, and San Francisco's Chinatown? Which of these groups and historical periods can claim "proper English"? We may feel comfortable in English, but English is a protean language that has taken many different shapes as it's moved through history and amongst the many different cultures and people who now call it home. The history of any language is a history of change and conflict, and this is particularly true when it comes to English.

In this course, we'll explore the English language through readings and discussions about cultural, grammatical and historical aspects of English. We'll consider how historical and cultural forces influence the teaching of English and what gets defined as "correct" and "literate" uses of language, and we'll wrestle with issues of language and identity, location, culture, and power. We'll pay special attention to debates about English in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century America, from global Englishes to vernacular dialects to "txtspeak" and "English only" legislation.

## Required Text

Language: Introductory Readings (7<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Eds. Clark, Eschholz, Rosa, Simon, Bedford-St. Martin's, 2008. [available at the Pitt Bookstore]

All other readings will be available via CourseWeb or public websites.

## Course Projects

Summary and Grading:

- 20% ~250word response every week on the blog, plus a midterm and final blog portfolio, posted online
- 10% Teaching group: 1 week as teacher (in a group of 4) in class, and question-asker on the blog
- 30% Five 500 word papers (you can write one each week but your best 5 will be graded)
- 15% Midterm
- 15% Final
- 10% Participation and preparation

## Teaching Groups

A small group of students (~4) will have the opportunity to *teach* the class for all or most of one class session (at least 30 min) about an issue, practice, or problem they have collaboratively researched. I emphasize the word "teach" because I want to make it clear that these student groups are not meant merely to report on information gathered (as in a conventional group presentation); rather, they are meant to help their classmates to investigate, question, and ponder the material at hand. In other words, teaching groups are responsible not only for sharing what they have discovered but also for sharing it in such a way that the class gets to participate in discussion of the relevant issues. Creative and lively approaches to these sessions are especially welcome!

On the course blog, individual members of the teaching group are responsible for posting a question pertaining to the readings or ideas of the week by the Sunday night before their teaching session. (In other words, there should be at least 4 questions posted on the blog posted on Sundays so that students can respond by Tuesday night.) Questions should contribute to our ability to understand and wrestle with ideas in the course.

Groups will meet with me in office hours, preferably by the week before class, to discuss their teaching plans for the next week.

Based in part on written advice from the class itself, I'll give each teaching group a grade according to what they've helped their peers to learn about their subject. For practical reasons, I'll decide how the groups are composed, but I'll give you a chance during the first class to sign up for your preferences. [Thanks to my colleague Jim Seitz for the original design and explanation of this activity.]

## Blog posts

By the Sunday prior to each week of the course, either the Teaching Group or Prof. Vee will post questions to the course blog: [www.annettevee.com/2012spring\\_engcmp1551](http://www.annettevee.com/2012spring_engcmp1551). Each week by Tuesday night, you'll comment on a post of your choice with a substantive (~250word) response, preferably referring to outside readings, current issues (with links and evidence), or your own experiences. These blog posts will be available to the public, so I recommend that you treat each one as if it's a published piece—that is, think carefully about what you say and proofread it.

Individual blog posts and responses will not be graded, but I will read them and occasionally respond to them. Your blogs will be assessed at midterm and near the end of the course, based on a portfolio of your best comments that you assemble.

## Papers

You will write at least five 500 word papers for this course, all of them to be turned in on CourseWeb. You are welcome to write more; you will have the opportunity to turn in a paper almost every week of the course. I will take your 5 highest grades for inclusion in your final grade for the course. Every Weds on CourseWeb, I will post an essay prompt, and your response to that essay is due at the end of the day by the next Weds. Late papers will not be read or graded. You must turn in at least 3 papers by Spring Break.

These papers are short and so you must use your space wisely. Make a clean, smart, well-organized argument that references readings and ideas from the course. Your objective is to enter into the ongoing conversation about a particular language issue and to represent your own linguistically-informed thinking on it. Each paper must reference at least one reading from the course that week.

Papers cannot be rewritten to be regraded, but you are welcome to visit me in office hours to discuss drafts. I recommend that you visit the Writing Center to help you draft your papers.

## Participation

Participation in the class consists of short writings and activities in class, discussion, and your general contributions to the work we do together.

Someone with an excellent participation grade:

- will have attended class and appeared engaged without fail;
- will have offered timely, insightful comments to his or her peers;
- will have always brought her readings or other materials to class; and
- will have contributed regularly and thoughtfully to class discussions.

Some people are more likely to speak up than others and some are more comfortable sharing ideas after they have had more time to process them; for these reasons, I offer both online (that is, written and not time-sensitive) and offline (that is, vocal and real-time) venues in which to participate in the class. It's normal to be more comfortable in one space

than another, but I believe that you will need to be proficient in sharing your ideas in real-time, face-to-face contexts to be a successful teacher, entrepreneur, employee, or almost anything else you may want to be in the future. Therefore, I may call on you in class to give you an opportunity to share your ideas. Please see me if you have questions about how to participate more actively in any area of the class.

## Exams

Exams will be primarily essay based. The midterm exam will be given in class on Feb. 22. The final exam will be given on the university's schedule, during Finals Week, April 23-28. You will have an opportunity to review materials with me and with each other before each exam. You will not be given any questions ahead of time. If you need special accommodations for timed exams, please discuss this with me early in the semester.

## Course Policies & Procedures

### Attendance

Regular attendance in this course is required. You need to be in class, on time, prepared, every meeting. If you miss more than **one** week total of this course (2 class meetings), your final grade will be lowered: half a letter grade for each absence over two. If you miss more than two weeks total of this course (4 class meetings), you will not pass the course.

It is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course changes from a classmate if you do miss a class. It is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete the missing work. In-class work cannot be made up. If you miss class on the day a written assignment is due, make arrangements to turn it in on time.

I understand that things happen and occasionally you may need to miss a class because you're sick, you've missed your flight back to campus, or you have pressing personal or family issues. The policy above allows for such absences without penalty. If you need to be absent for some extraordinary reason—because of a severe accident or illness, a family emergency or death, a religious holiday or jury duty—please let me know, and we will work something out. For such absences, either prior notification or subsequent documentation will be required.

### Guidelines for Written Work

I have specified word limits for assignments rather than page limits so that you do not need to use wide margins or tiny, strange fonts to display your work. Please use reader-friendly fonts such as Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Garamond, or Helvetica and sizes that are humane for your readers (10-12 point). Please use 1.5 to 2 line spacing. All work should be turned in on CourseWeb unless otherwise noted or arranged with me.

## Academic Integrity

The University asks us to include in our course descriptions this quotation from Pitt's Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom (February 1974):

The integrity of the academic process requires fair and impartial evaluation on the part of faculty and honest academic conduct on the part of students. To this end, students are expected to conduct themselves at a high level of responsibility in the fulfillment of the course of their study. It is the corresponding responsibility of faculty to make clear to students those standards by which students will be evaluated, and the resources permissible for use by students during the course of their study and evaluation. The educational process is perceived as a joint faculty-student enterprise which will perforce involve professional judgment by faculty and may involve—without penalty—reasoned exception by students to the data or views offered by faculty.

Plagiarism hurts the relationships and scholarship we construct during this class. Assignments for this course are designed to be relevant to your future work as a teacher or learner and should be completed by each student, with the exception of help from peers, me and the Writing Center. I find that assignments are rarely plagiarized in full; more commonly, students plagiarize by improperly quoting and documenting their sources. We will review how to properly document sources in class and I am happy to answer questions about how you can ensure that work you do for the class is your own. Additionally, please visit the English Department's site defining plagiarism and explaining how to properly document sources: [http://www.englishlit.pitt.edu/lit\\_plagiarism.html](http://www.englishlit.pitt.edu/lit_plagiarism.html).

Should you plagiarize, consequences are severe: students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted above, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process that I initiate. A minimum sanction of a failing grade for the paper or project will be imposed.

## Disability Resources

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please inform me and the Office of Disability Resources and Services as early as possible in the term. You can reach DRS at (412) 648-7890 or (412) 383-7355 (TTY) and you can visit their office at 216 William Pitt Union. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

## The Writing Center

The Writing Center is a free tutorial service for Pitt students. Writing Center consultants can help you learn how to generate ideas, organize your writing, and understand assignments. They can help you understand and deal with any sentence-level problems that you have, too. It's a great place to go in order to have a reader respond to your work so that you can do some intensive work on your writing. You can call for an appointment at (412) 624-6556 or make an appointment online: <http://www.rich36.com/pitt/>.

The writing center is located in 317B of O'Hara Street Student Center and it is open Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Friday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. You can also visit the satellite site at Hillman Library. Visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/> for more information.

## Technology etiquette

Please turn off your cell phone **before** class begins and keep it inside your book bag, purse, etc.—do *not* keep it on your desk during class. I allow and encourage the use of computers, netbooks, tablets, etc. in class for those who want to take notes digitally during class. These devices are *not* for socializing during class, however—during class you must log out of Facebook, Twitter, IM and the message boards you follow. Studies show that these activities are distracting to your ability to learn and participate. You may visit our blog, Wikipedia or dictionary sites, etc. to help you understand a concept we're discussing in class, but be prepared to explain any of your in-class Internet use to the entire class. If you are socializing online or on your phone (including texting) during class, then you will be considered absent for that class period. Please contact me if you have specific questions about this policy.

## Course Schedule

Readings and assignments are due the day they are listed below and should be brought to class, either in print or digital form. Readings from *Language* are available in the textbook for the course; all other readings will be available under "Readings" on CourseWeb, unless otherwise noted. The course calendar is subject to change.

### Part I: Thinking about Language

#### **Week 1: Ways to look at language**

Jan 9

Introduction to the course

Jan 10: register, then post an introduction and comment to the blog  
(choose a pseudonym for a username; password to register: ENGLISH)

Jan 11

Daniels, "Nine Ideas about Language," *Language*, p. 3-19

Bolton, "Language, An Introduction," *Language*, p. 21-32

#### **Week 2: Syntax and grammar**

Jan 16: MLK Day, no class (Jan 17: add/drop deadline)

Jan 17: blog comment 1 due

Jan 18

Weaver, Constance. "Grammar and the Teaching of Grammar," "Teaching Grammar," and "Acquiring Grammatical Competence." *Teaching Grammar in Context*. 1-57.

## Part II: History

### **Week 3: Historical overview of English & Chaucer**

Jan 23

Roberts, "A Brief History of English," *Language*, p. 330-339

Pinker, Steven. "The Tower of Babel," *Language*, p. 235-250

Jan 24: blog comment 2 due

Jan 25

Chaucer, Prologue [guest lecture by Prof. Ryan McDermott]

### **Week 4: 18<sup>th</sup> century English & Samuel Johnson**

Jan 30

Introduction, Samuel Johnson's dictionary

Reading on Johnson's dictionary, TBA

Jan 31: blog comment 3 due

Feb 1

Teaching group 1

### **Week 5: 19<sup>th</sup> century American English and Noah Webster**

Feb 6

Lepore, Jill. "An American Language." *A is for American*. pp 15-41. (on Noah Webster, language and construction of the nation)

Pederson, "Dialects," *Language*, p. 341-353.

Feb 7: blog comment 4 due

Feb 8

Teaching group 2

## Part III: Dialects and Diversity

### **Week 6: Varieties of English**

Feb 13

Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Standards and Vernaculars," *Language*, p. 398-408

Delpit, Lisa. "Language diversity and learning," *Other People's Children*.

Selections from the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE:

<http://dare.wisc.edu/>)

Feb 14: blog comment 5 due

Feb 15

Teaching group 3

### **Week 7: African American Vernacular English (AAVE)**

Feb 20

Smitherman, "From Africa to the New World" and "It Bees that way sometime," *Talkin and Testifyin*, 1-34.

Smitherman, "Black English/Ebonics: What it be like?"

Oakland Resolution, *Language*, p. 410-412

Rickford, "Suite for Ebony and Phonics" *Language*, p. 414-422

*Blog comments are optional this week.*

Feb 22

**MIDTERM EXAM**

**Week 8: Language and class**

Feb 27

Macaulay, "Regional Dialects and Social Class," *Language*, p. 383-396

Reading on Pittsburgh English, TBA

George Bernard Shaw, Introduction to *Pygmalion*

"My Fair Lady," [movie], 1964

Feb 28: blog comment 6 due

Feb 29

Teaching group 4

**Midterm Blog portfolio due (choose 3 comments)**

**You must have turned in at least 3 papers by this date.**

**Week 9: SPRING BREAK**

**Week 10: English-only politics & education**

Mar 12

*Stories of English*: Ch. 6 "Trilingual Nation"

"Rearing Bilingual Children in a Monolingual Culture" and "English Language Learners in School," *Language*.

James Crawford, "Ten Common Fallacies about Bilingual Education"

Phyllis Schlafly, "English Should Be Our Official Language"

Mar 13: blog comment 7 due

Mar 14

Teaching group 5

Part IV: Contemporary Language Play and Change

**Week 10: Global English**

Mar 19

Crystal, "Why a Global Language," *Language*, p. 693-716

Kincaid, Jamaica. "On Seeing England for the First Time"

Teaching group 6

Mar 20: blog comment 8 due

Mar 21

Class canceled (Prof. Vee is out of town for a professional conference.)

**Week 11: Global English and economics**

Mar 26

NBC's *Outsourced*

Reading on immigration and language, TBA

Mar 27: blog comment 9 due

Mar 28

Teaching group 7



**Week 12: Technology and language change**

Apr 2

David Crystal, "txtting"  
Reading on Twitter, TBA  
Apr 3: blog comment 10 due

Apr 4

Teaching group 8

**Week 13: Playing with language**

Apr 9

Steven Pinker on swearing (1h, watch selections in class)  
<http://thesciencenetwork.org/>  
Harryette Mullen, "Sleeping with the Dictionary"  
Crystal, children playing with language.  
Reading on signifying, TBA  
Apr 10: blog comment 11 due

Apr 11

Teaching group 9

**Week 14: English in contemporary politics**

Apr 16

Obama speech, TBA  
Colbert, Stephen on "Truthiness"  
Zadie Smith, 2008 lecture "speaking in tongues" (begin at min 13)  
<http://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/speaking-tongues-zadie-smith>  
Lakoff & Johnson: Metaphors we live by

Apr 18

Review for final exam  
**Final Blog Portfolio due (choose 3 comments posted after Mar 1)**

**FINAL (during finals week, April 23-28)**