

## **Course Outline for LING 320 (Sociolinguistics 1)**

**Content:** This course will provide you with an introduction to the study of **LANGUAGE VARIATION AND CHANGE**, a subject that comprises three closely related disciplines: **HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS** (the study of how languages change over time); **DIALECTOLOGY** (the study of regional variation in language); and **SOCIOLINGUISTICS** (the study of the relationships between language and society). While we will explore all of these subjects and the relations among them, our main emphasis will be on Sociolinguistics, including both **CORRELATIONAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS** (how social factors like age, sex and social class influence linguistic variation) and many topics in the **SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE** (the role of language in human behavior and social organization). Included among the latter are situations of language contact (pidgins & creoles, multilingualism, etc.) and issues related to disciplines like anthropology, education, gender & cultural studies, politics, social psychology and sociology. This course is a prerequisite for all advanced courses in language variation and change: Historical Linguistics (LING 425); Sociolinguistics 2 (LING 520); and Dialectology (LING 521).

**Content advisory:** Some of the topics we discuss in this class, such as the nature of sex or social class differences, the relation of language to disadvantage or the proper role of language planning, are controversial, giving rise in some cases to strong views and emotions. In a spirit of scientific inquiry, while maintaining due respect for all individuals and groups, open debate on these topics will be encouraged. If you do not feel comfortable discussing such issues, and perhaps challenging your own views on them, you might prefer to take a different course.

**Instructional method and technology policy:** This class involves traditional teaching methods, including lectures (without PowerPoint) and class discussion, as well as a few document projections and audio examples. **The course will not involve any online content or materials:** submission of written work and all non-classroom communication between students and the instructor will be exclusively by **email** (*not* myCourses). Emails will be sent to the addresses on the official class list; it is the student's responsibility to make sure that they are received. Regular attendance in class and good note-taking are therefore encouraged, as is doing assigned readings before the class in which they will be discussed. Laptops and voice recorders are permitted in the classroom, but photography is not. Use of laptops and other electronic devices must be appropriate to and respectful of the classroom environment: recreational use of the internet during class is inappropriate and distracting for other students. Cell phones should be turned off and put away during class. If you do not think you can function well in this environment, you are strongly encouraged to choose a different course.

**Time/Place:** Tuesday/Thursday, 08:35-09:55 a.m., ENGMD (Macdonald Engineering) 279.

**Instructor:** Prof. Charles Boberg. E-mail: [charles.boberg@mcgill.ca](mailto:charles.boberg@mcgill.ca). Office: 1085 Dr. Penfield, #223.

NB: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information). Also note that, in accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

**Access to the instructor:** Please e-mail me if you have questions or concerns about the course or about other advising matters. If desired, an in-person meeting can be scheduled by e-mail. If you have brief comments or questions, you are encouraged to talk to me after class.

**Required textbook:** Ronald Wardhaugh (2010), *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. Earlier editions may be substituted, but avoid the more recent 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> editions, co-authored with Janet Fuller, which have been substantially altered from previous editions and are no longer suitable for this course. The 6<sup>th</sup> edition is now out of print, but can be purchased as an e-book from the McGill Bookstore:

<https://mcgillcampusstore.ca/textbooks>

It may also be possible to purchase used copies from various sources, or even to find online access to a digital copy, though the instructor does not condone the use of unlicensed materials.

**Prerequisite:** LING 201 or permission of instructor. This should not be your first linguistics course. While the emphasis in this course will be on the interaction of language and society rather than on theoretical models of grammar, you will be expected to understand basic concepts of linguistic analysis, such as are taught in an introductory course in general linguistics. If you have concerns about your level of preparation, consult the instructor.

<b>Evaluation:</b>	Midterm exam	20%	Term paper	30%
	Data collection assignment	10%	Final exam (cumulative)	40%

**Midterm exam:** to be written in class on the day indicated below. Absences on the exam day (anticipated or unanticipated) should be discussed with the instructor as soon as possible. At the instructor's discretion, following discussion of the reason for the absence, a grade adjustment may be possible. In the case of absence on medical grounds, proper documentation of a suitably serious and unanticipated condition is required. Where the absence is not deemed excusable, a grade of zero will be awarded.

**Data collection assignment:** In order to give students some hands-on experience in gathering sociolinguistic data, you are required to collect ten responses (or more, if you like!) to a sociolinguistic **questionnaire** and enter the resulting data on an Excel spreadsheet. The data from the whole class will then be compiled by the instructor and presented in a report, which we will discuss as an example of the kinds of variation we study in the course. Together with your data, you will submit a brief (3 pages) **written report** on how you gathered your data and what kinds of variation you observed, on the date indicated below. The necessary forms, along with detailed instructions on the questionnaire and format of the report, will be distributed later. The entire assignment is worth 10%: 0.5% for each valid questionnaire response, to a maximum of 5% for 10 responses; and the remaining 5% for the written report. **Group work** is encouraged but not required. If you work with other students, each student in the group is responsible for collecting ten responses, for which credit will be evenly distributed; the report can then be jointly written, based on a larger and more diverse set of data than one student could collect alone.

**Term paper:** You are required to write a term paper for this class, worth 30% of your grade, to be submitted on the date indicated below. This will be a paper of **10-12 pages** (12-point font,

double-spaced), in which you either: a) discuss and take a position on one of the topics from the following list, with a critical review of at least five articles, chapters or books on your topic; or b) report on your own investigation of linguistic variation and/or change, based on data from at least 20 people. In either case, you may work **individually** or in a **group** with other students, as you prefer.

*Term paper essay option A: Essay*

Students pursuing Option A should choose one of the following seven topics:

1) **Standard vs. non-standard:** take a position on the role of the standard variety of English or another language. Is “correct” usage important or not, and why? Should it be taught in schools, or required in certain professional contexts? Is it realistic to expect public evaluations of non-standard varieties to change?

2) The **role of the mass media** in linguistic variation and change: do the modern mass media, including social media and the internet, serve to encourage or limit regional and/or social variation in language? Do they speed up language change or slow it down? Can you identify specific examples of such influence? In linguistic terms, will the digital age produce one global monolithic culture or a new diversity of specialized communities, each with unique characteristics?

3) **English as a global language:** how will the role of English as a global language affect the future development of English, particularly as the numerical balance of English-speakers shifts from traditional communities like Britain, the U.S. or Canada to new communities in Europe, Africa, Asia or Latin America? Will one or two global standards persist, or will English break up the way Latin did? Is Global English a productive and liberating tool for people around the world, bringing new opportunities, or a destroyer of local language and culture, or both?

4) **Language planning:** compare and evaluate efforts to revive or sustain traditional or minority languages in at least two different parts of the world, e.g., the Celtic languages in Britain, French or indigenous languages in Canada, or Hebrew in Israel. Concentrate on factors that predict failure or success in each case, to develop a more general account of this issue.

5) **Bilingualism:** Argue for or against the maintenance of two official languages in Quebec, Canada, the United States or somewhere else. E.g., should Quebec grant official status to its historic Anglophone minority? Should Canada abandon bilingualism where numbers do not support it, or promote Chinese, or Cree and Inuktitut, to official status, in addition to English and French? Should Spanish gain or be barred from official recognition in the United States?

6) **Language, sex and gender:** What causes sex or gender differences in language use? In Ch. 13, Wardhaugh discusses several possible explanations, all of which contribute to our understanding, but, like many other social scientists, he rejects outright the possibility that biological and genetic factors might play a role, without even considering any evidence (p. 346). Yet there is an increasing consensus among neuroscientists that biological and genetic factors do have an important impact, in combination with cultural, environmental and social factors, on cognitive and behavioral differences between men and women, including those related to language. Acquaint yourself with some of this research (e.g., that of Canadian neuroscientists Doreen Kimura and Sandra Witelson) and develop and discuss some hypotheses about how it might help us understand sex-based sociolinguistic variation in a new light.

7) **LGBT speech:** Most people, gay and straight, have some ability to identify what they consider to be “gay-sounding” speech, especially for gay men, yet linguistic research on this

ability has struggled to identify exactly which features of speech people rely on in these identifications. Review and compare several production and/or perception studies of the features of LGBT speech and offer your own view of what constitutes identifiably gay-sounding speech.

The main goal of this type of term paper is for you to deepen and broaden your knowledge of your chosen topic well beyond the discussion in the textbook, by developing a thesis or position on it or a research question to explore, and by finding, reading and discussing **at least five books, book chapters or journal articles** on it that inform your thesis or your answer to the research question. These sources should be diverse in their perspective, offering a variety of viewpoints and/or emphasizing different aspects of the topic, to give you a broad view of it. If you find an anthology of research on your topic, with chapters written by different authors, each chapter can count as a separate source. At least five of the reviewed sources must be **traditionally-published** academic articles, books or chapters in books, rather than internet materials available only in electronic form (e.g. websites or Wikipedia, etc.). You may of course use internet search engines, including Google Scholar or the McGill Library's on-line catalog, to identify these materials, and traditionally-published sources accessed via the internet, such as through the Library's electronic journal subscriptions, also count as traditional sources (as long as they are published in printed, paper form somewhere). If you have difficulty finding what you want in the library, by all means ask a librarian for help. The specialist for Linguistics is Veronica Bergsten (email: [veronica.bergsten@mcgill.ca](mailto:veronica.bergsten@mcgill.ca)); see also the Library's on-line guide to Linguistics research at: <https://libraryguides.mcgill.ca/linguistics>. Introductory textbooks, including the text for this course, cannot be counted as one of your five sources, but can serve as a valuable guide to published work on all of the above topics (in fact, depending on your topic, you should read ahead in the Wardhaugh textbook to see what he says about it and follow up some of his citations and suggestions for further reading). Once you have satisfied the requirement for five traditional sources, you may supplement these with as many other references as you like, in any media, including websites.

Your essay should take the following form:

1. Introduction: statement of topic and thesis or research question.
2. Review of previous research: summarize the facts and arguments presented by each source you have consulted.
3. Discussion: compare and contrast your sources, carefully examining and assessing evidence and arguments on each side of your topic, and use this discussion to present and support your own view of the issue or answer to the research question.
4. Conclusion: briefly summarize your topic, sources and discussion and suggest ideas for future research.

### *Term paper Option B: Research Project*

This is your chance to contribute something new to our knowledge of language variation and change. Follow these steps:

1. Working individually or in a group, choose a **linguistic variable** (or variables) to investigate. Variables can be variant words, pronunciations, grammatical forms, discourse markers, spellings, etc., in any language or dialect you like. They can be based on your own anecdotal experience or on what you have learned in this course or from

other published studies. If you are studying variation in words or spellings you should choose at least five variables to study. If your variable is a phoneme, like /r/, or a grammatical construction, then one variable is sufficient. You are strongly advised to consult with the instructor before beginning your research project, to make sure it is appropriate.

2. Having identified your variables and their variants, formulate a **research question** and a **hypothesis** about how they vary: is the frequency of the variants determined by age, sex, social class, region, time or a combination of these or some other factor? What correlations do you expect to see between these independent variables and your chosen linguistic variables?
3. Design a project in which you **gather and analyze data** on the variables you have chosen to study. This will normally involve a questionnaire or set of interviews, administered in person or remotely over the internet, but it is also possible to study written language and archival or media speech, such as newspapers, web sites, films, TV shows, popular song lyrics or internet videos.
4. Collect enough data to support a **comparison of at least two groups of ten speakers each**, differentiated in terms of your independent variable(s): two or more age groups, regions, time periods, etc. If you are working in a group, each member should contribute 20 or more responses. The more data you collect, the more confidence you will have in the patterns you observe (this is an advantage of group work).
5. Write a **report** in which you present your project. This report should have six labeled sections:
  1. Introduction: explain the topic of your project and the linguistic and independent variables you studied and present your hypothesis about the variation. This discussion should be supported with references to appropriate previous research, including that presented in the textbook but also other studies that you have found on your own, relating your topic (see essay option above for research tips).
  2. Method: explain how you collected your data and the characteristics of your sample (how many people in each group, attributes of those people, etc.).
  3. Results: present, in tabular or graphic form or both, the data you collected. This presentation should be clearly related to your research question and hypothesis: if you hypothesized that younger people would use a word or pronunciation more than older people, your table or graph should show summary data for your two age groups so the reader can compare them. Normally, only aggregate, group-level data are presented, not individual data on each speaker or respondent.
  4. Discussion: identify the patterns in your data and explain how they answer your research question and address your hypothesis. Was your hypothesis correct? If so, what does this tell us about language variation and/or change? If not, why might this be? Might a different method have achieved a different result, or did your hypothesis not take an important factor into account?
  5. Conclusion: briefly summarize your project and its conclusions and offer suggestions for future research based on what you learned.
  6. References: list, in alphabetical order by author's last name, all published works and other sources that are cited in the text of your report.

**Policy on submission of written assignments (data collection assignment and term paper):** either individual or **group work** and submissions are acceptable. For group submissions, names of all members should be clearly indicated and all members will receive the same grade.

Written work should be **submitted by email** (to charles.boberg@mcgill.ca) as a **Word or pdf attachment**, by 11:59 pm (23h59) on the date indicated in the schedule below. It is the **student's responsibility** to ensure timely and effective submission of all written work; any irregularities in this respect, including late submissions, should be communicated clearly to the instructor. It is best not to wait until the last minute to submit your work, as unanticipated delays can occur: you should plan to submit your work at least an hour before the deadline.

**Late submissions** will be penalized at a rate of 10% of the paper grade per day, including weekends and starting at midnight of the due date (a minute after 11:59 pm). **Extensions** of submission deadlines will not be granted except in cases of legitimate, unanticipated and properly documented medical emergency or other serious incapacity. Requests for extension should be made as soon as possible and it is the student's responsibility to mitigate as much as possible any delays arising from unexpected obstacles. The instructor reserves the right to reject extension requests that do not appear to be adequately justified.

In writing and **formatting** your text, you should observe the following guidelines:

- All written assignments should be **neatly** presented, beginning with a **title page** stating the student's name and McGill ID number, the title of the submission, the course (LING 320) and the date. For group assignments, ID numbers may be omitted on privacy grounds.
- **Page numbers** and a header containing the student's or group's name should be included on every page of text (following the title page) except, if you prefer, the first page; page numbering should count the first page of text, not the title page, as page 1.
- The main text of the paper should be in **12-point font, double-spaced**.
- The text should be free of typographical, stylistic and grammatical errors, so **edit** your work carefully before submitting it. Care in this regard shows respect both for your own work and for your reader. If you have difficulties in this respect, or you are not a native-speaker of English, you are encouraged to seek help in checking over your text before you submit it.
- **In-text citation** should follow the normal practice in Linguistics, which is to identify the author's last name and the year and, if possible, page number of the citation in parentheses after the quotation or cited idea, e.g., "quoted text" (Smith 1975:12).
- Students are reminded that all ideas, facts and spoken or written passages taken from other sources or authors must be properly attributed to their original sources and/or authors, and that failure to do so may constitute **plagiarism**, which could result in a failing grade on the paper or, potentially, more serious disciplinary measures. If you have questions or concerns about citation, consult the instructor.
- Papers should conclude with a **list of references** to all works cited in the text, in a consistent format, with entries listed alphabetically by author's last name. Beyond that, the particular reference format you use is up to you (if in doubt, use the reference list in the course textbook or one of the assigned articles as a model).
- **Tables and figures** (graphs or illustrations), if used, should be sequentially numbered for easy reference and accompanied by brief captions explaining their content.
- **Appendices** of extra material may be included after the list of references but will not be read unless specifically referred to in the body of the paper; appendices do not count towards the page-length of the paper.

If you have any additional questions or concerns about written assignments, you are encouraged to consult the instructor as early as possible.

**Policy on attendance:** attendance in classes is not mandatory but is strongly encouraged, as students who do not attend regularly will miss important material, which may have a significant negative impact on their performance in the course. This includes classes in which assignments and exam results are reviewed. If you must be absent for medical or other serious and unavoidable reasons, upon presenting documentation of those reasons you may request an individual meeting in which the material you missed can be reviewed and discussed. If your absence is not sufficiently justified, no accommodation will be offered, but students who were absent for an exam review may ask to see their exams briefly after a subsequent class.

**Policy on grades:** the grades assigned to assignments, papers and exams in this class are **not negotiable**. Students are encouraged to point out mathematical errors in grade calculation and are also welcome to request explanations of grades in cases where they do not understand the basis of the assessment, but requests for review and explanation aimed principally at negotiating for a higher grade (also known as “grade-grubbing”) will not be well received. Students should keep in mind that such requests reflect poorly on the student making them and are disrespectful of both the instructor and the other students in the class.

**Policy on fairness and accommodations:** it is crucially important that all students in this class be assessed and evaluated according to the same standard, as set forth in this course outline. Requests that special circumstances be taken into consideration in individual cases must therefore be assessed very carefully, as granting them may give one student an unfair advantage over others: without proper justification, a request for advantageous treatment of one student, such as a deadline extension, amounts to asking that all other students be put at an unfair disadvantage. Students with professionally diagnosed and ongoing medical or psychological conditions that require accommodation have recourse to the Student Accessibility and Achievement service (<https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>). In all other cases, any accommodations that are granted shall have the goal of restoring fairness in situations where it has been compromised by serious and unavoidable barriers or challenges faced by an individual student, such as an unanticipated medical condition or family trauma. Even in these situations, students are expected to act responsibly to mitigate the impact of the setback, as well as to communicate promptly, clearly and honestly with the instructor about their situation. Only requests judged by the instructor to be both valid and properly documented shall be granted and the nature of any accommodation offered shall be at the instructor’s discretion.

**Policy on cell phones and other electronic devices in relation to exams:** further to the general technology policy stated above, students are reminded of McGill’s policy, stated in its University Regulations and Resources, that, “As per the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures, Article 17, cheating in any examination is considered a serious offence that could lead to expulsion from the University. Students are not permitted to have in their possession, or to use, any unauthorized materials during an examination. This includes electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, MP3 players, PDAs, smart watches, and other web-access devices. Unauthorized items used during an exam will be reported to the Disciplinary Officer.” In this class, any student who consults a cell phone or other device during an exam will receive a grade of zero on the exam and be reported to the university authorities. Exams in this class are confidential. Any

student who photographs an exam or is suspected of sharing copies or images of an exam with other students, or of receiving such copies or images, will be reported to the authorities.

**Policy on use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications:** the written work you submit in this class should represent your own research, thinking and writing. Using AI tools to produce written work limits your learning as a student and misrepresents the skills and achievements that are being assessed in this course. Inappropriate use of AI will be treated as a form of cheating and reported to the Disciplinary Officer.



**Tentative schedule** of lectures, readings, assignments and exams:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Lecture topic/Exam</i>	<i>Readings due, etc.</i>
01.07	TU	Introduction (review of course outline, etc.)	
01.09	TH	No class: instructor absent (at conference)	
01.14	TU	Introduction: variation and linguistic theory	Ch. 1
01.16	TH	Regional & social varieties; style; speech communities; networks	Ch. 2, 5
01.21	TU	Dialectology: regional variation	Ch. 6
01.23	TH	Regional variation, continued	
01.28	TU	Regional variation, continued	
01.30	TH	Linguistic variables; social variation	
02.04	TU	Variation studies: theory & method; statistics	
02.06	TH	Fischer and Labov	Ch. 7
02.11	TU	Trudgill, Cheshire, Milroys, Wolfram, etc.	<b>DATA DUE</b>
02.13	TH	Historical linguistics	Ch. 8
02.18	TU	Language change in progress	
02.20	TH	Mechanism of language change	
02.25	TU	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>
02.27	TH	Language contact phenomena; Pidgins & creoles	Ch. 3
03.03-03.07	M-F	No class: <b>READING BREAK</b>	<b>BREAK</b>
03.11	TU	Review of midterm exam; diglossia, bilingualism & code-switching	Ch. 4
03.13	TH	Language & culture; ethnography of communication	Ch. 9-10
03.18	TU	Solidarity & politeness; speech acts	Ch. 11-12
03.20	TH	Language & gender; language & disadvantage	Ch. 13-14 <b>TERM PAPERS</b>
03.25	TU	Discussion: language, gender & disadvantage	
03.27	TH	Language planning	Ch. 15
04.01	TU	Language planning in North America	
04.03	TH	Language planning in North America, cont'd	
04.08	TU	Discussion: language planning in North America	
04.10	TH	Discussion cont'd; pre-final exam review	
TBA		<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>