

Language Variation and Change

Type of course: Proseminar (*Aufbaumodul Linguistics*)
Time: Mo. 10-12 a.m. (10:15 - 11:45)
Venue: Carl-Zeiss-Str. 3, SR 122
Workload: **5 ECTS**

The great
source of
pleasure is
variety.



Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Course description

This seminar is concerned with one of the most fundamental properties of human languages, their variability. In the course of the semester, we will aim at developing a systematic way of describing and explaining variation in the English language. We will consider variation within and across speech communities, as well as variation in time, i.e. the emergence and change of linguistic systems within both a linguistic community and a single speaker. Students will gain a basic understanding of how languages develop, how language variation, change and acquisition are related to one another, how 'irregular' or particularly intriguing grammatical phenomena of present-day English can be explained in historical terms, and how traditionally distinct branches of linguistics, such as sociolinguistics, historical linguistics and typology, can mutually inform each other. The seminar will thus provide an opportunity to look into various fields of linguistic research, to become familiar with a wide range of linguistic phenomena and research methods, and, ultimately, to pick an interesting topic for your first term paper in linguistics.

Requirements and grading system

Regular attendance and active class participation (including regular oral contributions or a short presentation)
Three homework assignments throughout the semester (about 1 page each)
Term paper (about 12 pages)

The lion's share of your final grade will be based on the term paper (60%), while each assignment and your performance in class (participation and presentations) will contribute 10% ($4 \times 10 = 40\%$).

Readings

The seminar discussion is based on obligatory weekly readings (see syllabus for details). It is crucial that you come to class prepared since the readings will generally serve as an important basis for the ideas to be developed in our discussions.

For your convenience, the master copies of the *obligatory* readings have been assembled in a **READER**, to be obtained from *Fischer's Copy Shop* (Leutragraben 2, next to *Bagels and Beans*).

Throughout the semester, suggestions for further readings will continuously be provided.

A general note on the readings: As a Proseminar is supposed to provide a chance to practise the in-depth reading, analysis and discussion of academic texts, the amount of time that you'll probably need to put into the weekly preparation of each session is not to be underestimated! Please remember that the course is worth 5 ECTS (which amounts to a sum total of 150 hours of work).

Surgery

Please take advantage of the office hours taking place every Thursday. This is not only the place to discuss in advance the outline of reports, but also to talk about your progress in the course and any difficulties you may experience, as well as to receive individual feedback on assignments and to develop ideas for your term paper.

Course programme (syllabus)

| | DATE | TOPIC | PREPARATORY READING (obligatory!) |
|----|----------|--|---|
| 1 | 22.10.07 | Introduction <i>Goals and scope of the course. Organisation. Convention and variation in language.</i> | |
| 2 | 29.10.07 | Variation within a speech community <i>Basic notions of sociolinguistic research and variationist linguistics.</i> | Quirk et al. 1992: 15-33. |
| 3 | 05.11.07 | <i>Grammatical variation in non-standard varieties of English (geography and ethnic group); language and social class (prestige).</i> | Thomas 1996 Report: Trudgill 2000: ch.2 (excerpts) and Sneesby 2002 |
| 4 | 12.11.07 | Variation in time (I): Diachronic change in a speech community <i>Methodological issues; Introduction to semantic and lexical change.</i> | McMahon 1994: ch.7 (174-199) |
| 5 | 19.11.07 | <i>Lexical change: the history of the English word stock.</i> | Leisi and Mair 1999: ch.2 (41-77) |
| 6 | 26.11.07 | <i>Morphosyntactic change: The emergence of grammatical constructions (case study: Reanalysis and grammaticalization in the domain of future time reference in English).</i> | Quirk et al. 1992: 213-218. [suggested: Tomasello 2003: 292-295] |
| 7 | 03.12.07 | <i>Explaining synchronic grammatical properties in historical terms (bound morphology; the Present Perfect construction; atypical alignment).</i> | Huddleston and Pullum 2005: 48-51. Assignment 1 due |
| 8 | 10.12.07 | <i>Explaining synchronic irregularities – auxiliaries and past tense forms; Current syntactic changes in English.</i> | Bybee and Thompson 1997 Report: Mair and Leech 2006 |
| 9 | 17.12.07 | Variation across speech communities <i>English from a cross-linguistic perspective.</i> | Whaley 1997: ch.1 (3-17) |
| 10 | 07.01.08 | Variation and change: interaction <i>Variation as change in progress; Patterns of spread.</i> | Aitchison 2001: ch.4 (55-67) |
| 11 | 14.01.08 | <i>Social factors of spread (prestige, gender, social networks and interaction); Linguistic patterns of diffusion (Lexical diffusion of phonetic and syntactic innovations).</i> | Holmes 2001: ch.9 (194-216) Assignment 2 due Reports: Aitchison 2001: ch.6; ch.7. |
| 12 | 21.01.08 | <i>A unified account of variation and change: Replication, utterance selection and the invisible hand.</i> | Evans and Green 2006: 120-133. |
| 13 | 28.01.08 | Variation in time (II): Language development in the individual <i>Becoming familiar with some developmental milestones in first language acquisition.</i> | Steinberg 1993: ch.1 (3-29) [suggested: Hoff 2005: ch.1] |
| 14 | 04.02.08 | <i>Continuity and change in language acquisition. The relationship between acquisition and diachronic change.</i> | Assignment 3 due [no obligatory reading, but suggested: Clark 2003: 409-422 and 426-433] |
| 15 | 11.02.08 | Wrap-up (summary and conclusion) <i>How to write a term paper in linguistics (methodological issues)</i> | Ellis 2008 (short excerpt) Bring to class: (a) any remaining questions (b) a possible term paper topic |

In addition to our regular meetings, there will be *two* practical **TUTORIALS** which provide a general introduction to linguistic research (principles, data gathering, bibliographical research, structure of a term/research paper etc.). Time and venue will be negotiated during the first class. Attendance is absolutely voluntary – no obligation to show up.