

ENGLISH 3960W-002: TTh: 4:00-5:15 p.m. (NichH 145)

Senior Seminar: LANGUAGE AND GENDER

## SYLLABUS



**Instructor:** Professor Genevieve Escure (escur001@umn.edu)

Office: 210-D Lind Hall

Phone: 625 6095

Office Hours: TH: 2:45-3:45 p.m.

TTH: 5:30-6:00 p.m.

and by appointment

### 1. TEXTBOOK AND READING MATERIALS:

- 1) P. Eckert & S. McConnell-Ginet. 2003. *Language and gender*. Cambridge.
- 2) a packet of articles documenting earlier and current research on language and gender (to be determined in the second week).

Various additional materials, summaries and worksheets will be provided to supplement lectures and discussions throughout the semester.

**2. OUTLINE AND GOALS:** This course examines from a primarily sociolinguistic perspective the relationship between language use, sex, and the cultural construction of gender in various social systems. The primary goal is to analyze how women and men define their gender identity and roles in social interactions as reflected primarily in speech behavior. Various frameworks for analysis will be discussed in conjunction with a series of articles documenting the issue of sex-linked linguistic differentiation. Special attention will be given to the distribution and symbolic significance of certain linguistic

features in socially and ethnically diverse speech communities of the U.S., Europe, Central America and the Caribbean, with reference to patterns of dialect and style variation.

This overview of current research on men's and women's speech patterns will enable us to test the accuracy of a number of widespread stereotypes (often based on superficial observations) such as:

- women's speech is more correct and polite than men's speech
- men's speech is more specific and logical than women's speech
- men's speech is more innovating and women's speech more conservative
- there are crosscultural universals that are represented in the way women and men use language.

Some of the linguistic features to be examined in relation to the gender variable will include the following:

- Phonological (vowel or consonant variation, intonation patterns)
- Morphological (grammatical gender; marking of plural, tense; pronouns)
- Syntactic (sentence structure)
- Discourse (interruptions, silences, discourse particles)

**3. GRADING:** The senior seminar is a writing-intensive research-oriented course, and the resulting senior paper fulfills the Writing Intensive requirement. It consists of three drafts — following a brief (one-page) research proposal that will be promptly returned to you, so you can decide on your research topic (see Course information, section 3 below for further information).

In addition, students will present, discuss, and summarize four or five articles.

**There is no exam in this seminar.**

Your overall grade will be based on your paper (**60%**) and four article summaries (**40%**), as shown below:

**Research Paper:**

One page-proposal	<b>9/21</b>	[not graded]
First paper draft	<b>10/12</b>	<b>20%</b>
Second paper draft	<b>11/9</b>	<b>20%</b>
Final Paper	<b>12/12</b>	<b>20%</b>

**Four Article Summaries:** **10% each** [to be assigned in class]

#### 4. TOPICS AND SCHEDULE:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Reading</b> (refers to chapters in E/McG book)
1. Sept 5-7	General Introduction.	ch.1
2. Sept 12-14	Overview of linguistic and social aspects of gender	ch.2
3. Sept 19-21	Gender and linguistic variables. Overview of phonetics <b>One-page project proposals due</b> [not graded]	
4. Sept 26-28	Gender and linguistic variables. Overview of syntax	
5. Oct 3-5	Conversation and control	ch.3
6. Oct 10-12	Speech acts <b>First paper draft</b>	ch.4
7. Oct 17-19	Positioning. Same sex and cross sex talk	ch.5
8. Oct 24-26	Meaning and context	ch.6
9. Oct 31-Nov 2	Labels and boundaries	ch.7
10. Nov 7-9	Language variation and gender <b>Second paper draft</b>	ch.8
11. Nov 14-16	Dominance and gender in low-status groups	
12. Nov 21	Style and identity NOV 23: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving holiday)	ch.9
13. Nov 28-30	Sexual orientation and gender	
14. Dec 5-7	Are there sociolinguistic universals of gender?	
15. Dec 12	<b>Oral presentation</b> of students' research projects. <b>Final research paper due.</b>	

#### 5. COURSE INFORMATION

1. *Attendance and preparation:* Students are expected to attend **ALL** class meetings, and to remain in class for the duration of the class period. Attendance will be taken at each class. **Missing a class without a documented excuse will result in an F.**

2. *Communication.* Please do not hesitate to visit me frequently during my office hours (or arrange other meeting times if necessary) to discuss your research progress, and other issues that may arise in class.

3. *Research Paper and Research objectives.* Students are expected to conduct brief, but original research that will provide a realistic analysis of language use as it relates to gender. The research paper is developed under the close supervision of the instructor.

Language affects every part of your life. The primary objective of your linguistic investigation of the interaction of language and gender is to assess current stereotypes on men and women's use of language, and thus observe actual communication in real life contexts. You may observe the use of English in local American contexts, and in various ethnic situations, but you can also choose to work with other languages that you may be familiar with.

The second objective is to provide you with the opportunity to demonstrate your writing ability, so you can meet the WI requirement. You will also demonstrate—in a preliminary but significant way—that you can conduct independent research and produce an organized, coherent research report.

On **September 21** students turn in a one-page proposal outlining their research plans. Three drafts will be subsequently submitted at regular intervals (see schedule) and graded. Each new draft is an expanded version leading to the final paper due on **December 12**. The successive drafts will be graded for style and content, as fulfillment of the writing intensive requirement. Recommendations for improvement will be included on each of the drafts returned to the students. Research progress will be discussed in class as needed, so all students can share their research interests and receive feedback from their classmates.

4. *Writing Requirement.* The research paper and written article summaries satisfy the Writing Intensive requirement.

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### SOME POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS

[The following topics are merely indicative; you may select any other appropriate topic]

1. *The use of interruptions by male and female college students.*
2. *The use of the discourse marker 'like' across three generations of women.*
3. *Absence of interdentals in older Swedish-American immigrants.*
4. *English acquisition by young Hmong children and pre-adolescents.*
5. *The **be** structure as marker of habitual aspect in African American English adult men and women.*
6. *Gender stereotypes in television soap operas.*
7. *Use of passive structures in oral and written varieties.*
8. *Phonological variation of the suffix (ing) in natural adult conversations.*
9. *Vowel variation as a gender marker in a rural speech community of Northern Minnesota.*
10. *Sexual orientation as represented in pronominal usage.*
11. *Taboo words as discourse markers in the speech of college students.*
12. *Polite language in Japanese.*