

Language and Identity among “Hyphenated” Americans

Arts and Letters 100g: 35242R

University of Southern California

Hebrew Union College Jerome H. Louchheim School of Judaic Studies

Fall 2006

Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3:20pm

Classroom: Taper Hall 106

Office: Hebrew Union College, Rm. 8 (basement)

This syllabus and other course materials are available
on Blackboard: login at <http://totale.usc.edu>

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Office Hours:

Mon 3:30-4:30pm

and by appointment (don't be shy!)

Course Description

In the multicultural society of the United States, people have multiple allegiances. Racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups construct their identities partly through distinct ways of speaking English. In this class, we will explore the connection between language and identity through short stories, essays, memoirs, novels, poetry, film, and music. Several questions will drive the class:

1. How do “hyphenated” Americans use language and other cultural practices to express both their Americanness and their distinctiveness?
2. How have writers and filmmakers represented this double consciousness? How have they used language to shape characters, represent inter-group relations, and create a world we recognize in imaginative work?
3. How much control do we have over how we are viewed by others?
4. How does a group's distinctiveness – past and present – affect its language and culture?

In addition, we will explore the relationships between race/ethnicity and other social dimensions, like gender, socioeconomic class, sexuality, and religion. Minority groups on the syllabus include Native Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, American Jews, Hawaiians, Asian Americans, South Asian Americans, and Arab Americans. Important goals of this class are to sharpen your ability to read, watch, and listen analytically, think critically, and express your thoughts well, both orally and in writing.

Course Requirements

I. Regular attendance and participation are essential for the creation of a stable, stimulating learning environment and are therefore required. I will take role at the beginning of each class; more than two absences will result in a grade reduction. You will be held responsible for all material presented in class as well as the reading assignments. I suggest that you get e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers for two classmates to arrange to get notes and handouts in the event that you are absent.

II. Critical comprehension of assigned readings and knowledgeable engagement in class discussions are essential. Because class discussion will revolve around the readings, you will be expected to come to class having completed all of the reading. I repeat: you must prepare for each class in order to participate effectively. Notice that prepared class participation is worth 20% of your grade.

An additional way to participate is by contributing to discussions on Blackboard.

III. Three assignments (to be turned in via Blackboard):

Assignment #1: Your personal language and identity autobiography (2-4 pages)

Assignment #2 (to be done in pairs): Analysis of a film, a TV show, a book, or 2-3 short stories or songs, focusing on issues of language and identity, to be presented in class and written up (5-6 pages)

Assignment #3: Comparative analysis of two works of fiction about different ethnic groups (8-10 pages)

IV. A final exam

Grading

Your grade in the course will be based on the following formula:

Class participation	20% (regular attendance, informed discussion, and presentation)
Writing assignments	55% (10%, 20%, 25%)
Final examination	25%

Required Books (available in the book store or on Amazon.com)

1. *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural* ed. by Claudine C. O’Hearn. Pantheon.
2. *Borderlands/La Frontera*, by Gloria Anzaldúa
3. *Growing Up Ethnic In America: Contemporary Fiction About Learning to Be American*, ed. by Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan. Penguin.
4. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, by Ronald Wardhaugh. Blackwell. 5th edition.
5. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven*, by Sherman Alexie. Harper Trade.
6. *Push*, by Sapphire
7. *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros. Vintage Contemporaries.
8. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, by Maxine Hong Kingston. Vintage International.
9. *Interpreter of Maladies*, by Jhumpa Lahiri. Houghton Mifflin.
10. *Dinarzad’s Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction*, by Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa. University of Arkansas Press.
11. *Passing: When People Can’t Be Who They Are*, by Brooke Kroeger. Perseus.
12. Course reader, available at the USC bookstore

*Note: some of the literature and films include “R-rated” themes and language.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another individual. Most simply, plagiarism can be characterized as “academic theft.” As defined in the University Student Conduct Code, plagiarism includes: “The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student’s own work whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near verbatim form;” “The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style;” and “improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers.” Because of the serious penalties for plagiarism, you should ensure that any writing you submit represents your own assertions and abilities and incorporates other texts in an open and honest manner. In academic assignments, writing is assumed to be the original words and thoughts of the student unless otherwise noted (i.e., material from other sources is clearly and properly cited). The best way to avoid plagiarism is to be careful to document your sources, even when you are only making use of data or ideas rather than an actual quote. Students who violate academic standards will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. In accordance with these standards, plagiarism will result in an ‘F’ grade for the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the University.

Accommodation of Disabilities

Students requesting academic accommodations due to disabilities must register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) as early in the semester as possible (STU 301, tel. 740-0776, open 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday). Please bring me your letter of verification for approved accommodations early in the semester, and let me know if you need any assistance with this process.

How To Reach Me

I am available to help you with your writing, your presentation, and your comprehension of the course material. Students are expected to make one or two appointments to meet with me during the semester.

The best way to get in touch with me is via e-mail (sbenor@huc.edu). You can also call me at my office (213-765-2124), leave a note in my mailbox on the main floor of Hebrew Union College (at the corner of Hoover and 32nd, about one block north of Jefferson), or talk to me after class or during my office hours.

Schedule

(R) = found in course reader

Otherwise, readings are found in the required books.

8/21: Introduction to class

8/23: Language and identity autobiographies

Wamba, Philippe. 1998. "A Middle Passage." In *Half and Half*. 150-169.

Álvarez, Julia. 1998. "A White Woman of Color." In *Half and Half*. 139-149.

8/28: Double consciousness

DuBois, W.E.B. 1903. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." In *The Souls of Black Folk*. Penguin Classics. 3-12.

Read online: <http://www.bartleby.com/114/1.html>

Assignment #1 (Language and Identity Autobiography) due: e-copy on Blackboard and hard copy in class

8/30: Distinguishing between self and "other"

Candalaria, Nash. 1999. "The Day the Cisco Kid Shot John Wayne." In *Growing Up Ethnic in America*. 45-63.

Morrison, Toni. 1999 (1970). Excerpts from *The Bluest Eye*. In *Growing Up Ethnic in America*. 115-121.

Cofer, Judith Ortiz. 1999. "American History." In *Growing Up Ethnic in America*. 93-102.

9/4: No class (Labor Day)

9/6: Immigration

Danquah, Meri Nana-Ama. 1998. "Life as an Alien." In *Half and Half*. 99-111.

Rosten, Leo (Leonard Q. Ross). 1937. *The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N*. New York: Harcourt. Excerpt: 3-34. (R)

9/11: Inter-generational conflict

Alvarez, Julia. 1991. "Daughter of Invention." In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin. Reprinted in *Growing Up Latino*, Augenbraum and Stavans, eds. 3-15. (R)

Geha, Joseph. 1999. "Holy Toledo." In *Growing Up Ethnic in America*. 242-259.

Gillan, Maria Mazziotti. "Carlton Fredericks and My Mother." In *Growing Up Ethnic in America*. 260-267.

9/13: Borderlands

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1999(1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books. 23-45; 99-113.

Proposals for Assignment #2 due today.

9/18: Language and identity

Wardhaugh, Ronald. 2006 [1986]. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. 5th edition. 25-54.
Presentation schedule will be distributed today.

9/20: Language variation: region, ethnic group, socioeconomic class

Wardhaugh, Ronald. 2006 [1986]. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. 5th edition. 119-132, 162-183.

Native Americans

9/25:

These stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* by Sherman Alexie:
Because my Father Always Said he was the Only Indian who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock (24-36).
The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore (43-53).
This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona (59-75).

9/27:

These stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* by Sherman Alexie:
The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor (154-170).
Indian Education (171-180).
Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (181-190).

10/2: No class: Yom Kippur

African Americans

10/4:

Rickford, John Russell and Russell John Rickford. 2000. *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: John Wiley and Sons. 91-128. (R)
Jordan, June (1985). “Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan.” In *On Call: Political Essays*. Boston: South End Press. 123-139. (R)

10/9:

hooks, bell. 1995. “This is the Oppressor’s Language/Yet I Need it to Talk to You”: Language, a Place of Struggle. In *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*, ed. by Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press. 295-301. (R)
Alim, H. Samy. 2004. “Hip Hop Nation Language.” In *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century*. Edward Finegan and John R. Rickford, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 387-409. (R)
In class: discuss poetry by Maya Angelou, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Tupac Shakur, and others

10/11:

Sapphire. 1997. *Push*. New York: Vintage.
Sample presentation by instructor

Latino Americans

10/16:

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*.
Student presentations begin today.

10/18:

Díaz, Junot. 1996. "Edison, New Jersey." In *Drown*. New York: Riverhead Books. 121-140. (R)
Martínez, Rubén. 1998. "Technicolor." In *Half and Half*. 245-264.

10/20 (Friday):

Assignment #2 due via Blackboard

10/23:

Stavans, Ilan. 2003. *Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*. New York: Harper Collins. 1-17, skim 251-258. (R)
Borderlands. 75-86.

Contemporary American Jews / Jewish Americans

10/25:

Goodman, Allegra. 1996. "The Four Questions." *Commentary* 101:4. 42-50. (R)
Wasserman, Eric. 2005. "Next Year in Kona." In *The Temporary Life*. Woodside, CA: La Questa Press. 13-40. (R)
Guest speaker: Eric Wasserman, writer

10/30:

Englander, Nathan. 1999. "Reb Kringle." In *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*. New York: Knopf. 141-152. (R)
Dreisinger, Baz. 2005. "Spot the Jew." In *The Modern Jewish Girl's Guide to Guilt*. Ruth Andrew Ellenson, ed. New York: Dutton. 173-181. (R)

Hawaiians

11/1:

Hongo, Garrett. 1998. "Lost in Place." In *Half and Half*. 1-11.
Mura, David. 1998. "Reflections on My Daughter." In *Half and Half*. 80-98.
In class: Hawaiian Creole English (Pidgin).

Friday, 11/3:

Submit proposal for Assignment #3 via Blackboard.

Asian Americans

11/6:

Jen, Gish. 1999. "What Means Switch." In *Growing Up Ethnic in America*. 175-196.
Tan, Amy. 2004. "Yes and No." In *The Genius of Language: Fifteen Writers Reflect on Their Mother Tongues*. Ed., Wendy Lesser. New York: Pantheon. (about 10 pages) (R)

11/8:

Kingston, Maxine Hong. 1989 [1976]. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Vintage International. 3-16, 20-53, 163-209.

South Asian Americans

11/13:

Lahiri, Jhumpa. 1999. "When Mr. Pirazda Came to Dine" and "Sexy." In *Interpreter of Maladies*. 23-42, 83-111.

Arab Americans

11/15:

4 stories in *Dinarzad's Children*:

Darraj, Susan Muaddi. 2004. "The New World." 15-30.

Jarrar, Randa. 2004. "A Frame for the Sky." 31-42.

Jarrar, Randa. 2004. "Lost in Freakin' Yonkers." 43-56.

Shakir, Evelyn. 2004. "Oh, Lebanon." 57-72.

Friday, 11/17:

Assignment #3 first draft due via Blackboard

11/20:

Abu-Jaber, Diana. 2005. *The Language of Baklava*. New York: Pantheon. 194-202, 234-250, 317-328.
(R)

Multiple hyphenations

11/22:

O'Hearn, Claudine Chiawei. 1998. "Introduction." In *Half and Half*. vii-xiv.

Senna, Danzy. 1998. "The Mulatto Millennium." In *Half and Half*. 12-27.

Friday, 11/24:

Assignment #3 peer review comments due via Blackboard

Passing

11/27:

Kroeger, Brooke. 2003. "Not Some Social Agenda Struggle" and "Passing, Virginia." In *Passing: When People Can't Be Who They Are*. New York: Perseus. 11-64.

11/29:

Kroeger, Brooke. 2003. "That's Not Me." In *Passing*. 65-91.

Review

Friday, 12/1:

Assignment #3 final draft due

Assignments

Assignment #1:

In 2-4 pages, describe your identity, and discuss how it relates to language.

In case you would like some guiding questions:

Who are you in relation to the social categories of race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic class, sexuality, religion, location, and/or ancestral heritage? Which of these categories are important to how you see yourself and how you think you are viewed by others? Why and how? What role does language play in how you construct your identities? What roles do physical appearance, music, home decoration, and food play?

I am not looking for “academic writing” in this assignment, and I am not looking for straight answers to the questions above. Be yourself. Feel free to be creative in how you present the narrative (it could take the form of an essay, a letter, a dramatic monologue or dialogue, a poem, or anything else you can think of), and be clear and concise in your writing. After you write it, read it over twice and don’t be shy about removing extraneous words, phrases, or even paragraphs. Login to Blackboard as you prepare this assignment. You’ll find essay writing tips and examples of last year’s students’ autobiographies.

You will be graded using the following rubric:

(30 points) Writing: clarity, grammar

(30 points) Content of your discussion of identity and language

(20 points) Structure (it doesn’t have to be traditional essay format, but it needs some structure)

(20 points) Creativity

Assignment #2 (in pairs):

Analysis of a film or TV show, focusing on issues of language and identity, to be presented in class and written up in 5-6 pages. This assignment is to be done in pairs.

Your analysis should be driven by the following question: How does your selected work use language to represent an ethnic, immigrant, or other social group or the relations between groups? Please discuss at least two of the following **sociolinguistic phenomena** (which will be discussed in detail in class) as they are portrayed in your selected work:

- Sociolinguistic variation among characters of different socio-economic class, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, generation of immigration, etc.
- Individual style shifting or code switching (according to situation, audience, topic, etc.) used to negotiate identities
- Metalinguistic conversation, especially stemming from (conflicting) language ideologies; language discrimination
- Passing: using language to pass as part of a different community
- Crossing: using language styles of a different group without intention of passing
- Progression of linguistic and cultural integration into American society or into a different social class
- Generational conflict with respect to language and identity
- Borderlands: how a character feels caught in a borderlands between two cultures and how this manifests in language

In addition, think about whether the groups and events are portrayed authentically and whether the portrayal reproduces stereotypes. Your essay should have a unifying theme, and the sociolinguistic phenomena you discuss should relate to that theme. Assume your audience is not familiar with the work.

Some ideas for films to choose from:

Barbershop, My Big Fat Greek Wedding, Bringing Down the House, Spanglish, Undercover Brother, Driving Miss Daisy, Clueless, Malibu's Most Wanted, The Joy Luck Club, Smoke Signals, House of Sand and Fog, The Lion King, Pocahontas, A Shark Tale, Good Will Hunting, Annie Hall, West Side Story, Real Women Have Curves, Do the Right Thing, Avalon, The Producers, Dreamkeeper, Bamboozled, Mi Familia, American Desi, Boys Don't Cry, Better Luck Tomorrow, Jungle Fever, My Cousin Vinny, Eight Mile, Catfish in Black Bean Sauce, Crash, The Debut, Harold and Kumar Go to Whitecastle.

Presentation stemming from Assignment #2:

In pairs, students will summarize their analysis, presenting excerpts from the film. The entire presentation (including excerpts, presentation about it, and class discussion) should last 15-20 minutes.

Proposals for Assignment #2:

Please post on Blackboard brief proposals of your project:

1. people who will be working on the project together
2. name of film
3. ethnic/social group(s) it deals with
4. some sociolinguistic phenomena you will be discussing.

List two choices of films in case there is overlap.

Grading of the 5-6-page paper (to be submitted in pairs):

(20 points) Structure (introduction, body [summary of the work, analysis], conclusion)

(20 points) Writing: clarity, grammar

(20 points) Strength of arguments, evidence from the film

(20 points) Discussion of identity and language, incorporation of concepts from class

(20 points) Discussion of at least two sociolinguistic phenomena

Assignment #3 (working alone):

Essay: Comparative analysis of two or more works from different ethnic groups (8-10 pages)

Students will select two works of fiction about different ethnic groups in the U.S. and write a comparative analysis, focusing on issues of language and identity. The works could be short stories, books, or films; at least one must be a work we did not discuss in class, and you may not use the work you used for your presentation.

The essay should compare and contrast how the two works deal with one or more issues surrounding identity. You should support your arguments using examples from the two works of fiction, and you are expected to incorporate some of the concepts discussed in class. The main focus should be on identity, and you are expected to make at least some reference to language.

You may want to consider some of these questions when formulating your arguments:

How do the characters deal with being hyphenated Americans?

How do the authors use language – in narration and dialogue – to portray the characters as belonging to multiple communities?

Do the works deal with issues that are universal or specific to a particular ethnic group?

Format

1. Title
2. Introduction – states main argument(s) in an enticing way
3. Body of the essay – should include summaries of the two works of fiction (assume that your audience is not familiar with them), examples from the texts to support your argument(s)
4. Conclusion – summarizes main points in an interesting way

You will submit your proposed topic via Blackboard, and the instructor will send you comments. You will submit a first draft, and there will be a peer review process before you submit the final draft.

Your paper will be graded using the following rubric (don't forget about the writing tips posted on Blackboard):

(25 points) Structure (see Format above)

(25 points) Writing: clarity, grammar

(25 points) Strength of arguments, evidence from the texts

(25 points) Deals with identity and language, incorporates concepts from class

When selecting works to analyze, you should choose works you like and are excited about. Your level of interest in the topic is likely to shine through in your writing, and any professor prefers to read an interesting paper...

Grading scale for this class:

93-100: A

90-92: A-

88-89: B+

83-87: B

80-82: B-

78-79: C+

73-77: C

70-72: C-

68-69: D+

63-67: D

60-62: D-

59 or below: F