

## **Linguistic Variation and Subcultural Styles**

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Office hours: Wednesdays 3-5

### **Course Description:**

This course explores the role of language as one of many semiotic strategies employed by youth subculturalists to carve out a distinctive place for themselves stylistically in particular social scenes. The course consists in three parts. First, we will examine background material, central works in the formation of cultural studies as a discipline in its own right. These works share a common focus on subcultures, their styles and the political economies which emerge through competition for limited social resources. In Part 1 we will explore the formation of “subculture” as a theoretical construct, as well as themes which intersect with this construct, such as collective identification through style.

Second, we will consider the place of language in symbolically differentiating social actors who are positioned oppositionally in a particular context, in our case, a High School in the U.S. In Part 2, we walk through a linguistic ethnography that describes in detail two opposing social formations – Jocks and Burnouts – that utilize a range of semiotic tactics for collectively identifying and producing distinction. We will unpack the polarization between Jocks and Burnouts, examining the relationship between institutional (dis)orientation and the asymmetrical use of semiotic strategies for managing persona, including phonetic variation and distinctive clothing. This part closes with a discussion about communities of practice, a type of social formation that is central to Penelope Eckert’s theoretical treatment of style and youth cultures.

Third, we close the course by looking in detail at four examples of research which focus on the relationships between style (including linguistic style), social formations, and hierarchy.

### **Texts:**

required: Gelder & Thornton, eds. (1997): *The Subcultures Reader* (SCR)

required: Eckert (2000): *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice* (LVSP)

I have also put some books on reserve that you will find useful to thumb through during the semester. These books include:

*Resistance through Rituals*. Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson, eds.

*Subculture: The meaning of style*. Dick Hebdige

**Homework:**

Your first assignment will be a critique or response to the readings for 8/31, SCR Chs.5-6. This critique should not exceed two pages. During the semester, you will be assigned two reaction papers, similar to the critique, in which you address particular issues from class. There will be a total of three substantive papers (4-6 pgs in length), comprising sixty percent of your total grade. For these papers, you will carry out a small study, or respond to a hypothetical prompt, using material from class and readings to support your position. Finally, there will be an end of term paper. Similar in aims to the three main papers (though somewhat longer at around 10 pages), this essay will be a response to one of several prompts based on our in-class discussions.

Papers should be **typed, stapled** (when more than one page), and handed in the day they are due in class. I will not accept emailed submissions. If you know you will not be in class the day an assignment is due, please contact me ahead of time. Late papers will be accepted only in cases of emergency (if such a situation arises, please contact me).

**Grading:**

Critique-----5  
2 Reaction Papers @ 5----10  
3 Papers @ 20----- 60  
Final Paper-----25  
  
**TOTAL-----100**

**Grade Scale:** 98-100: A+, 94-97: A, 91-93: A-, 88-90: B+, 84-87: B, 81-83: B-, 78-80: C+, 74-77: C, 71-73: C-, 68-70: D+, 64-67: D, 61-63: D-, < or = 60: F.

**Tentative Schedule:**

	Topics	Readings	Assignments
<b>Week 1:</b>	Intro and overview of syllabus		
8/24	Intro to subcultural studies: background & the Chicago School	SCR Ch. 2: Introduction to part one (Thornton) SCR Ch. 3: The City (Park)	Critique handed out
8/26	Birmingham: Theorizing subcultures	SCR Ch. 5: The concept of the sub-culture and its application (Gordon) SCR Ch. 6: A general theory of subcultures (Cohen)	
<b>Week 2:</b> 8/29	Birmingham tradition and style	SCR Ch. 15: Subculture: The meaning of style (Hebdige) Hebdige (1981): From	

		culture to hegemony (From Subculture)	
8/31	Clarke on Style	Clarke (1976): Style. (Resistance through Ritual)	Critique due
9/2	Hebdige on Youth Styles: Cases Studies	Hebdige (1981) Ch. 4: Case studies	Style assignment handed out
<b>Week 3:</b> 9/5	No class: <i>Labor day</i>		
9/7	Reggae, Rastas, and Rudies	Hebdige (1976): Reggae, Rastas, and Rudies (Resistance through Ritual)	
9/9	Mods	Hebdige (1976): The meaning of Mod ( <i>Resistance through Ritual</i> )	
<b>Week 4:</b> 9/12	After Birmingham: Post-subcultural theory & style	Weinzierl & Muggleton (2003): What is 'Post- Subcultural Studies' anyway? (The Post- Subcultures Reader)	
9/14	Politics of Style	Piano (2003): Resisting Subjects: DIY Feminism and the Politics of Style in Subcultural Production (The Post-Subcultures Reader)	Style assignment due / Subculture assignment handed out
9/16	Style and Subcultural Boundaries	Hodkinson (2002): Net. Goth: Internet Communication and (Sub) Cultural Boundaries (The Post-Subcultures Reader)	
<b>Week 5:</b> 9/19	Subcultures and Music	Laughey (2006). Subculture, club cultures and post-subcultures	
9/21	The Old and the New	Muggleton (2002). A Neo-Weberian Approach to the Study of Subcultural Style (Inside Subculture)	
9/23	Popular Music	Bennett (2000). Youth Culture and Popular Music (Popular music and youth culture)	
<b>Week 6:</b> 9/26	Language and Youth Cultures	Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) Ch 2: Individuals and Society - The linguistic turn in the study of identity (The Language of Youth Subcultures)	

9/27	Youth and Cultural Practice	Bucholtz (2002): Youth and Cultural Practice	Subculture assignment due
9/29	Styling Youth Identities Vocally	Eckert (1996): Vowels and nail polish	Media handed out
<b>Week 7:</b> 10/3	(Sub)cultural Approaches to Style in Sociolinguistics	Eckert (2002): Constructing meaning in sociolinguistic variation	
10/5	Style and Meaning	Eckert (2004): Meaning of Style	
10/7	Conventionalization	Eckert (2005): Variation, Convention, and Social Meaning	
<b>Week 8:</b> 10/10	Fall Break		
10/12	Symbols of Category Membership	Eckert (1989) Ch 4: Symbols of category membership	
10/14	Social Categories	Eckert (1989) Ch 5: The development of social categories	
<b>Week 9:</b> 10/17	Language Variation as Social Practice (LVSP): I	LVSP: Introduction and Chapter 1	Reaction Paper One handed out
10/19	Interpreting the Social Meaning of Variation	LVSP: Chs. 2-3	Media due
10/21	Vocalic Variables	LVSP: Ch. 4	
<b>Week 10:</b> 10/24	LVSP: II Outline of Variation in Belton High	LVSP: Ch. 5	Reaction Paper One due
10/26	We are What We Do	LVSP: Ch. 6	
10/28	Introducing Communities of Practice	LVSP: Ch. 7	
<b>Week 11:</b> 10/31	Language Variation as Social Practice: Communities of Practice	LVSP: Ch. 8	
11/2	One take on Communities of Practice	Meyerhoff (2004): Communities of practice	
11/4	Legitimacy and Agency	Davies (2005): Communities of practice: Legitimacy not choice	Final Paper instructions handed out
<b>Week 12:</b> 11/7	Bucholtz on B-boys and Nerd Girls	Bucholtz (1997) Marking black: The construction of white identities through linguistic stylization (from her dissertation)	Reaction Paper Two handed out
11/9	Gendered Dimensions of Whiteness	Bucholtz (1997) B-boys and nerd girls: Gendered dimensions of white oppositional identities (from her dissertation)	
11/11	Nerd Girls	Bucholtz (1999): Nerd	

		Girls	
<b>Week 13:</b> 11/14	Mendoza-Denton on Latina youth and gangs	Mendoza-Denton (1997) Ch. 2: Sor Juana High School (from her dissertation)	Reaction Paper Two due
11/16	Variation in the Speech Community	Mendoza-Denton (1997) Ch. 3: Variation in the Speech Community (from her dissertation)	
11/18	Discourse in the Speech Community	Mendoza-Denton (1997) Ch. 4: Discourse in the Speech Community (from her dissertation)	
<b>Week 14:</b> 11/21	Language, Stance, and Identity at Selwyn Girls' High (SGH)	Drager (2009) An ethnography of SGH (from her dissertation)	
11/23	Thanksgiving		
11/25	Thanksgiving		
<b>Week 15:</b> 11/28	Houston Hip Hop: A case study	Competing hip hop cultures: an overview (lecture)	
11/30		Enregistering local style (lecture)	
12/2		Parody as social action (lecture)	

### **Other Things to Note:**

If you have a documented disability please set up a time with me to discuss your needs; you must also register with Disability Services if you haven't already.

### **One Final Note:**

If you carry a cell phone, please turn it off or set it to silent before class begins.