LING 452/550 Sociolinguistics
Fall 2024
Synthesis Paper 2: Language Variation

In this unit, we have talked about ways that language varies. Specifically, we have discussed social class, ethnicity, gender, religion, time, and region. (The rest of this prompt is largely the same as the prompt for the previous synthesis paper, but it's here so you can see it again.)

The purpose of this synthesis paper is for you to connect the dots between these topics which may seem somewhat unrelated. They, as well as pretty much everything else we'll discuss in this course, are connected to each other because of their link to language and society. Your goal should be to show me that you can identify those links, beyond what we have discussed in class or read in the book.

How you draw connections between these topics is up to you. It's not like there's a specific secret I'm hoping you'll discover and will dock points if you don't catch it.

I encourage you to review your notes, the lecture materials, and the readings, now that we've completed the unit. On Learning Suite, I have put additional reading material that you may wish to skim if you need help with a particular topic. Since many of these ideas are foundational in sociolinguistics, you can also peruse other sociolinguistics textbooks and get another author's perspective on the same ideas. (The P 40 section of the library is where you'll find those.)

As you review the material and consider it as a unified idea, consider the following questions:
- What are the key patterns and themes across the unit?
- How do the topics interconnect and influence each other?
- How do these connections relate to broader themes or to real-world applications?
- What additional insights have you gained on some experience in your life now that you have learned about these topics?
- What experience from your life illustrates or exemplifies a connection between these ideas?

I encourage you strive for a high-quality paper that makes a nuanced connection between the topics and shows a deep understanding of them. Avoid superficial comparisons. Strive for a balance between all topics without emphasizing one too much. Show that you have learned material from this course by drawing on specific examples from class or the readings. Supplement those examples with additional examples. Aim for a well-written, polished piece of writing.

Please note that unlike the homework assignments, late work will not be accepted. Be prepared to discuss these ideas in class.

Here's the email I sent out as well that might help
To explain what I have in mind for the synthesis paper and presentation, I'll make an analogy. Imagine you're walking around giving me a tour of your neighborhood. You're pointing out all the details of each of the homes you know and maybe you know those people so you can give specific examples of your experience with them.

But, have you ever seen drone footage or satellite images of your neighborhood? If you have, you literally get a whole new perspective on your neighborhood. You probably get a greater appreciation for how far apart the houses are and maybe you didn't realize how close one is to your own because of the trees between them. Maybe you didn't realize how similar they look from above and maybe you realize that the one house down the street has a very different footprint than the others. You might also see general layout and orientation of the houses in relation to each other.

What I'm hoping for in a synthesis paper—and I realize this is stretching you to think hard about these topics—is the drone footage and not the walking tour. I hope (and assume) you have a good understanding of each topic, but you don't need to relate those to me. Especially not individually, with one paragraph per topic. The syntheses should treat the entire unit as a single cohesive idea, rather than the sum of its constituent parts. Furthermore, it should show that the general theme of this unit is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. It should read between the lines, notice the negative space between them, and start to fill in what we couldn't get to in five hours of class.

So, what new insights can be gleaned by viewing all topics simultaneously? How do they relate to each other? What new insight is gained from one now that you've learned about the others? What examples did we discuss in class earlier that could be enlightened by looking at them from a topic we talked about later? To answer these questions, you won't be able to dwell on one topic for too long, and you'll likely bring up a topic multiple times throughout the write-up as needed.

I hope the repeated mention of my forms of address study in class serves as a useful example because it shows that what someone calls another person is dependent on not just familiarity, not just audience design, and not just social networks, but rather all of them simultaneously (plus so much more).

The "narrative" of your write-up doesn't have to dwell on an extended example from your own life. You may not be able to think of an example that fits in, and that's okay. But there should be narrative and it should be shaped by the overall, broader, more abstract, more theoretical ideas that connect these five topics.

Anyway, I understand this is a difficult thing to write. (Welcome to a 400-level course!) But I'm hoping that by seeing the topics holistically you'll appreciate them and understand them on a more profound level, which is really the purpose of this assignment in the first place.