Linguistic Anthropology (ANT 401/501)  
Tuesdays/Thursdays 9:30-10:45 AM  
ten Hoor Hall #23

PREREQUISITS: Undergraduate students may enroll if they have taken Anthropology 210 or have permission from the instructor. There are no prerequisites for graduate students in the Department of Anthropology. Graduate students in other departments may enroll with the instructor’s permission.

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION:  
Matthew Wolfgram  
Email: mwolfgram@ua.edu  
Office Hour: Monday 10-noon, immediately after class; or by appointment  
Office Location: 25-C ten Hoor Hall  
Office Phone: 205-348-1959

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES:  
This course involves an advanced study of the anthropology of the relationship between language and culture. The readings for this course will consist of the work of anthropologists, linguists, literary theorists, and philosophers of language, and will include conceptual writings as well as empirical studies. Topics comprise the nature of linguistic value, models of language and culture, ethnographic methodology and the place of linguistic anthropology within American anthropology’s four fields, social interaction, language and social difference, and the translation of culture. At the conclusion of this course, students will have a critical understanding of the history of anthropological approaches to language. Students will also be able to apply the concepts and methods of linguistic anthropology to research questions in other areas of anthropology and the human sciences.

READINGS:  
All readings are posted on the course eLearning site. Please note that this is a course in anthropological theory: there is a lot of reading and it is often challenging. All students are required to read all the assigned texts below (although on weeks with heavy readings I will prioritize them). The expectation is that the graduate students will read and critique the readings at a higher level than the undergraduates (at least at the beginning of the semester). The instructor will end each class by advising the students on how to approach the readings for the next class.

ATTENDANCE AND MISSED COURSE WORK POLICIES:  
The students in this class are required to attend all the scheduled classes. Please be on time and have your cell phones off. Students should see the instructor after class or during office hours if they anticipate one or more absences. All work for the course should be submitted by the scheduled due date. You should approach the instructor before the due date if you have reasonable and compelling grounds to request an extension. A modest penalty will be assigned for unexcused late work.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

5%, class participation: Besides reading and being prepared and attending and participating in class, for Tuesday class students should write a brief paragraph that poses their thoughts and questions about the readings. Submit your responses to the eLearning discussion portal one day (24 hours) prior to class, after which all students should read and consider their peers’ submissions.

20%, 2 class presentations: Students in this class are responsible for leading two class discussions (normally on Thursdays). We will set up the schedule for these on the first day of class. The students will be responsible for handing out a set of study questions or guidelines for the discussion and they should confer with the professor prior to the class in order to get feedback and guidance. The discussion should also address and incorporate the comments and questions submitted to the eLearning discussion portal.

20%, 5 evaluative abstracts: Evaluative abstracts should be about 250-300 words long and summarize the key points or concepts of the piece and the empirical evidence used to support them, and briefly evaluate or critique the author’s position. Each abstract is due to the professor by the next class meeting after the reading is scheduled for discussion. After the submission is evaluated, abstracts should also be submitted to the eLearning discussion portal so that your peers can use it as a resource (in particular, as a resource for the midterm and final exams).

25%, take home midterm exam and 30% take home final exam: See schedule below for the due dates and the dates of distribution for these exams.

GRADING SCALE:

93-100% A; 90-92% A-; 87-89% B+; 84-86% B; 80-83% B-; 77-79% C+; 74-76% C; 70-73% C-; 67-69% D+; 64-66% D; 60-63% D-; 0-59% F.

SCHEDULE

PART I: INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTIC VALUE

8/23: Course introduction
No reading!

8/30: The linguistic sign


8/30: Language as semiotic

PART II: MODELS OF LANGUAGE AS MODELS OF CULTURE

9/4: Linguistics and American Anthropology


9/6: The Boasian legacy


9/11: Formalism and the cognitive revolution in linguistics


9/13: Patterns of language and culture

Sapir, Edward (1949). Selected writings of Edward Sapir. Berkeley: University of California Press. The following chapters:
(1933) “Language” (pp. 7-32);
(1925) “Sound patterns in language” (pp. 33-45);
(1933) “The psychological reality of phonemes” (pp. 46-60);
(1929) “The status of linguistics as a science” (160-166);
(1927) “The unconscious patterning of behavior in society” (pp. 544-559).

9/18: Hierarchy and opposition

9/20: Word and meaning


9/25: Language and culture as categorization


9/27: Grammar and Linguistic Relativity


10/2: Language and consciousness


10/4: Mid-Semester Break
10/9: Language as dialogue


PART III: METHODOLOGY AND FOUR-FIELD APPROACHES

10/11: Language and biology


10/16: Language and evolution


10/18: Language and History


Distribution of midterm take home exam class
10/23: Ethnography of communication


PART IV: LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

10/25: The social ontology of language


Midterm due at the beginning of class

10/30: Speech as multi-functional and multi-modal


11/1: Speech acts


11/6: Inference and presupposition

11/8: The turn-taking structure of conversation


11/13: Role and participation structure


11/15: No class on account of the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association

11/20: Class canceled. Use the day to catch-up or work ahead on your readings.

1/22: Thanksgiving break

PART V: LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCE

11/27: Speech communities

11/29: Language ideology and the linguistic division of labor


PART VI: ANTHROPOLOGY, TRANSLATING ACROSS CULTURES

12/4: Translation theory


12/6: Language and rationality


Course evaluations due

12/12: Final exam due emailed to the professor by 5pm.