

SEMINAR TOPIC: Dynamics of language variation and change

Instructor: Prof. Anna Maria Escobar, aescobar@illinois.edu, 4156 FLB

Meeting time: Tuesdays, 3:30 p.m.- 6:00 p.m., 1110 FLB

Office hours: Tues 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m., Thurs 9:00 a.m. – 10 a.m., and by appointment.

Description of the course

In this seminar we will discuss basic concepts in the literature on language variation and change from a *usage-based* and *speaker-oriented theory of language change* perspective, following Weinreich, Labov and Herzog's (1968) seminal paper. Discussion will center on notions such as the following: the *actuation problem*, the stages of language change, linguistic drift (drift 1 and drift 2), competition of variants and selection, selection and propagation, the S-curve, etc. In exploring the constraints on the process of language change and the models of language diffusion (*e.g.* the gravity model, the wave model, the cascade model), the roles of both structural (system-internal) and extra-linguistic factors will be discussed.

Among the system-internal factors in explaining language change, we will consider the roles of types of change (*e.g.* change in the form, rule extension, change in meaning or function), linguistic drift (1 and 2), the role of collocations, the place of universal or facilitation principles, markedness, and frequency, among others.

Among the extra-linguistic factors, we will discuss the roles played by the following: the child and the adult as potential innovators, social networks, dialect and language contact, social standing (leaders/followers) as a motivator for the diffusion of language change, change from above and change from below, and so on.

Readings will be taken from the literature on historical linguistics, historical sociolinguistics, dialectology and dialect contact, and language contact.

Format of the meetings

The seminar will be led in a reading-group and workshop styles, where all attendees are expected to come prepared and participate. Reading-guides for the weekly readings will be posted at least one week in advance. At each meeting there will be a 10 minute introduction to the topic of the day, after which we will start discussing the readings using the reading-guide as a starting point. Reading groups (2-4 people) will be formed for those days when several case-studies complement a theoretical reading. Each group will be the *speaker* for a study in the discussion.

Readings

The list of readings appears included in the tentative calendar. They will be accessible from a wiki-page designed especially for this course. <<http://wiki.cites.uiuc.edu>>

Evaluation

The final grade for the course will be based on participation in the discussion-meetings and a final paper (a research proposal, a pilot study, an expanded study, etc.), due on May 8. A one-page abstract plus 10 supporting bibliographical references (on a separate page) should be handed in for approval, no later than February 24.