

CLPS 0050G: First Year Seminar Pidgins, Creoles, and the Emergence of Language

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TuTh 2:30 pm - 03:50 pm
Metcalf Chemical Laboratory 105
Office Hours: TBA (Metcalf Research 241)

Overview

Pidgins and creoles are language systems that arise in situations of contact between groups without a common language. Their study has informed models of language change and has inspired theorizing about the origins of language, in particular the role children play as agents of language creation and language change. In the last twenty years, however, the field has seen significant upheavals, as foundational assumptions have been challenged and in some cases overturned.

This course will consider pidgins and creoles within their socio-historical context, with primary emphasis on what pidgins and creoles can tell us about language emergence and language change. Course materials will include a combination of readings from academic texts, the popular press, and primary source materials. Students will be expected to actively participate in class discussions and to complete a series of writing assignments beginning with personal reflections on the course readings and moving toward an engagement with the theoretical literature. Students will complete an independent research project on a topic of their choosing. Research will be library-based, and students will be assessed in part based on the final paper and a presentation of the work to their peers.

Prerequisites

None. The course is limited to first year students. Course enrolment will be capped at 20.

Required Texts

There are two required texts for the course. Both are available through the Brown Bookstore.

- Arends, J., P. Muysken, & N. Smith, eds. (1995). *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction*.
- McWhorter, J. (2011). *What Language Is (and what it isn't and what it could be)*.

Additional readings will be made available through course reserves or through the course web site.

Format and Assessment

Course meetings will be held twice weekly and will be conducted in a seminar format. The structure of the course emphasizes discussion and interactive learning. As such, students are expected to have completed readings prior to class and to be active participants in discussion. Students will be assessed based on their participation, writing assignments, and in-class presentations. Details for all assignments will be provided in class. Students will receive feedback on writing assignments with the opportunity to revise their work. There will be one midterm exam, but no final exam. The course will meet during reading period for in-class presentations of independent research projects, so please plan accordingly.

Weighting of course components in assessing final grades will be as follows:

- 10% writing journal (weekly entries in response to assigned readings)
- 10% group presentation of course material
- 15% writing assignment 1: guided essay
- 15% writing assignment 2: guided essay
- 20% midterm exam
- 25% final research project (prospectus, paper, and presentation)

Given the format of the course, attendance is critical. It is understood that students may on occasion miss a class meeting, and on those occasions it is the student's responsibility to make up for the missed session (for example by obtaining notes from a classmate). Students with more than two absences may be encouraged to drop the course or convert to a credit/no credit grade option. All students are expected to adhere to the Brown Academic Code (available from the web site of the Dean of the College).