

Sociolinguistics of Writing

LIN 4930 (22179) . LIN 6932 (22186)
Spring 2026. T5-6 (11:45-1:40) & R6 (12:50-1:40) . Turlington 2342

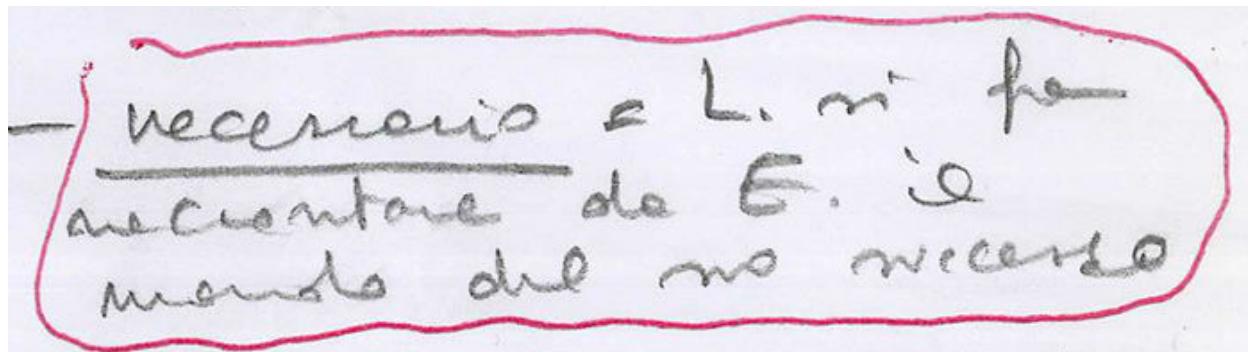
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Handwritten notes from Elena Ferrante's final revisions to her novel, *The Story of the Lost Child*. From *The Paris Review*, Spring 2015

Course description

Welcome to the Sociolinguistics of Writing. This is a joint undergraduate/graduate course in sociolinguistics with a focus on writing as a sociolinguistic object. The general theoretical orientation of the course is that of a contemporary sociolinguistics of globalization with its emphasis on mobility, multilingualism, and superdiversity. The sociolinguistics of writing is a relatively new yet robust field of research within sociolinguistics, and there is plenty of room for exploration, discussion, debate, and contribution. We will be studying writing practices from a number of different perspectives, focusing variously on literacy regimes, grassroots literacy, the stakes of spelling, multilingual writing, digital writing, and writing in public space, also known as linguistic landscape. While there are no prerequisites for this course, it will build on a basic familiarity with the field of sociolinguistics on the part of students.

Course objectives

Writing has only recently become an object of sociolinguistic inquiry. The emergence of this new field has occurred hand-in-hand with – and is partially the result of – new ways of approaching the study of language in a globalized and often digitalized world. In this course we will engage with recent attempts to understand these new realities and focus on writing as our object of inquiry. The specific goals of the course are:

- To become familiar with sociolinguistic ways of talking about and analyzing writing
- To acquire the critical skills necessary for analyzing writing and learn how to apply those skills to instances of writing
- To develop your ability to make informed and articulate arguments

- To survey the different paths of inquiry into writing within the field of sociolinguistics
- To gain experience in presenting oral and written arguments about writing
- To develop a deep understanding of the role of writing in society

Class format

Our class is a community where we all learn from our discussions with each other and our efforts to articulate our thoughts in oral and written form. My aim in this class is for us to spend our class time on activities and discussion that will enable you to explore, understand, and master the material we are considering. The format of this class demands that you, the students, be active participants in the learning process by a) doing the assigned readings; b) coming to class prepared and ready to contribute to conversations and activities on the day's topic; c) listening to your classmates, encouraging them, and sharing with them your thoughts, insights, or frustrations related to the material and topic at hand.

Requirements & attendance policy

To be part of our learning community in this class you are required to attend class, complete readings and assignments on time (before the class period in which we will discuss them), and participate fully in discussions and activities. I consider these requirements to be interrelated: you cannot do one without the other. You are entitled to one unexcused absence during the course of the semester, but you must provide documentation of extenuating circumstances for any other absence, otherwise they will count against your grade.

Notebook

An important semester-long assignment for this class is for you to keep a handwritten notebook that will serve as a record of how your understanding of the sociolinguistics of writing evolves and develops. Your notebook should consist of a body of notes you've taken about the readings you do, quotations that you find elucidating copied from those readings, and your own thoughts on the quotations and ideas they contain. I will check these notebooks at various points during the semester.

***Important note concerning the use of generative AI**

This is a class on the sociolinguistics of writing, writing that is created by humans, not computers. In order to understand the subject matter, you will have to engage in writing yourselves, without the use of generative AI, including programs such as ChatGPT. Tempting as it may be to use these tools, I do not want you to use them for this class, given the nature of the subject matter. In order to ensure that this is the case, please certify your writing with the following phrase at the end of all your assignments: "I certify that this paper is uniquely my own work, and that I have not used any type of artificial intelligence at any stage of creating it."

Books

The following books are required for this class:

Sebba, Mark. 2007. *Spelling and society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blommaert, Jan. 2008. *Grassroots literacy: Writing, identity and voice in central Africa*.

Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

We will be using additional selected articles and chapters which will be made available to you on our Canvas course web-page.

Grades

Grades are calculated as follows:

Quiz 1	15%
Quiz 2	15%
Short writing assignments	25%
Classroom contribution	20%
Notebook	10%
Final presentation	15%

The assignment of a final letter grade will be based on the following scale:

A 92-100	B 81-84.9	C 71-74.9	D 61-64.9
A- 88-91.9	B- 78-80.9	C- 68-70.9	D- 58-60.9
B+ 85-87.9	C+ 75-77.9	D+ 65-67.9	E Below 58

***For UF's academic policies and resources, please go to: <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>**

SCHEULE of TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS (*subject to minor change according to class needs)

January 13-15: Introduction to the sociolinguistics of writing

Reading: Lillis, Theresa and Carolyn McKinney. 2013. The sociolinguistics of writing in a global context: objects, lenses, consequences. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17(4):415-439.

January 20-22: Writing and “regimes of language”

Reading: Juffermans, Kasper. 2011. “Do you want me to translate this in English or in a better Mandinka language?” Unequal literacy regimes and grassroots spelling practices in peri-urban Gambia. *International Journal of Educational Development* 31:643-653.

Assignment: Short writing assignment

January 27-29: Spelling, scripts, orthography

Reading: Sebba, Mark. 2007. *Spelling and society*. Cambridge: CUP. Introduction and Chapters 1-2.

February 3-5: Spelling, scripts, orthography

Reading: Sebba, Mark. 2007. *Spelling and society*. Cambridge: CUP. Chapters TBA.
Assignment: Short writing assignment

February 10-12: Linguistic landscape

Test on February 10

Reading: Kallen, Jeffrey L. 2023. *Linguistic Landscapes: A sociolinguistic approach*. Cambridge: CUP. Chapters TBA.

February 17-19: Linguistic landscape

Reading: Stroud, Christopher and Sibonile Mpandukana. 2009. Towards a material ethnography of linguistic landscape: Multilingualism, mobility and space in a South African township.

Journal of Sociolinguistics 13(3):363-386.

Assignment: Short writing assignment

February 24-26: Linguistic landscape

Reading: El Guabli, Brahim. 2020. (Re)invention of tradition, subversive memory, and Morocco's re-Amazighization: From erasure of Imazighen to the performance of Tifinagh in public life. *Expressions maghrébines* 19(1):143-168.

Mc Laughlin, Fiona. 2015. Linguistic warscapes of northern Mali. *Linguistic Landscape* 1(3):213-242.

March 3-5: Grassroots literacy**Grassroots literacy**

Reading: Blommaert, Jan. 2008. *Grassroots literacy: Writing, identity and voice in central Africa*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge. Parts I and II

March 10-12: Grassroots literacy

Reading: Blommaert, Jan. 2008. *Grassroots literacy: Writing, identity and voice in central Africa*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge. Parts III and IV

Assignment: Short writing assignment

March 14-22 SPRING BREAK**March 24-26: Digital writing**

Readings: Barton, David and Carmen Lee. 2026. *Language online: Investigating digital texts and practices*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. Chapters TBA.

March 31-April 2: Digital writing

Reading: Barton, David and Carmen Lee. 2026. *Language online: Investigating digital texts and practices*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. Chapters TBA.

Mc Laughlin, Fiona. 2014. Senegalese digital repertoires in superdiversity: A case study from Seneweb. *Discourse, Context and Media* 4-5:29-37.

Assignment: Short writing assignment

April 7-9: Digital writing

Reading: Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 2021. Polymedia in interaction. *Pragmatics and Society* 12(5):707-724.

Tagg, Caroline & Agnieszka Lyons. 2021. Polymedia repertoires of networked individuals: A day-in-the-life approach. *Pragmatics and Society* 12(5):725-755.

April 14-16 Presentations

April 21: Presentations