

Edu T&L 905: The Ethnography of Communication

Fall 2008 and Winter 2009

Call # 08670-2 (Fall)

Professor Marcia Farr Email: farr.18@osu.edu Marcia Farr's [Personal Web site](#)

Mondays, 4:30 p.m. - 6:48 p.m.
200 Ramseyer Hall

Description of Course

This two-quarter course introduces the Ethnography of Communication as a field of inquiry. The primary aim of the course is to provide a theoretical and methodological framework for research on language and literacy. In addition to two texts that cover theory, methods, and central concepts of the field, other texts and readings provide examples of research carried out within this tradition.

Students will learn about the theoretical assumptions and conceptual frameworks of the Ethnography of Communication, as well as the various methods for gathering and analyzing data. Topics and concepts covered include Communicative Competence, Language Diversity, Speech Communities, Communicative Events, Ethnography and Transcription, Language as Form and as Action, Language Patterns and Attitudes across Populations, Analysis of Transcribed Language Data, Reflexivity in Ethnographic Research, Language Socialization, and Language, Ethnography and Power.

Since Ethnographers of Communication study oral and written language as they are embedded in various social and cultural contexts, this is a fertile framework for educational research on vernacular dialect speakers, English language learners, the use and acquisition of literacy, the inter-relationships of orality and literacy in daily practice across diverse populations, and other topics. This course is highly recommended for those considering language or literacy-focused ethnographic research for their dissertations.

Note: The Ethnography of Communication is offered every other year over two quarters. In the first quarter, students learn about theories and methodologies used in this field, select a topic and population for research, critically review available literature on that topic and population, and identify a field site for research. In the second quarter students continue to learn about theory and methodology, but also carry out a small pilot study of language and/or literacy in a particular context in settings within Central Ohio. (Selected students can negotiate other projects, such as drafting a proposal for dissertation research or developing a pilot project prior to dissertation research.)

Required Texts: Theory and Methodology

Saville-Troike, Muriel. 2003. *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*, third edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Duranti, Alessandro. (Ed.). 2001. *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell

Publishing.

Ethnographies

Farr, Marcia. 2006. *Rancheros in Chicagocán: Language and Identity in a Transnational Community*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Hoffman, Katherine. 2008. *We Share Walls: Language, Land, and Gender in Berber Morocco*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Mendoza-Denton, Norma. 2008. *Home Girls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Other Readings: Available on [Carmen](#).

Requirements

Participation and attendance. Students are expected to be in class, having read all assigned materials, and to actively participate in class discussions.

Assigned reading. A seminar does not work unless all participants have read assigned material carefully, so you are expected to read critically all material assigned for each week's discussion. As you read, think about, and write down, useful questions for discussion or issues that occur to you after each weekly class.

Each student will *lead class discussion* of two assigned readings. The most important task of this assignment is to present questions and perspectives on the major topics and issues of that week, and on the reading specifically, that will generate good discussion. Think about how you will stimulate discussion.

Suggestions: Choose particularly important passages for analysis and spend time on their explication. Choose key ideas and terms for elucidation, and focus on the relation of the reading to larger issues or themes, including previous weeks' readings and discussions. Collect reviews from academic journals and other publications and organize discussion around the assessment of these evaluations. Remember that the goal is to understand the reading's significance and contribution to large issues and questions. Think of ways of identifying themes and issues that include specific readings but may also refer to earlier weeks or look ahead to future weeks and topics. Depending on class size, two students (rather than one) might work together to lead the discussion. Seminar leaders are not expected to be responsible for the entire class session.

Assignments:

There are two major assignments for this course. For the "mid-term" students will work in small groups to **critically review** a book-length ethnography of communication (the Hoffman and Mendoza-Denton texts listed above; depending on class size, other books will be added to this list). This book review will be presented and evaluated in class. The second major assignment is a written one: each student will submit a final paper of 8-10 pages (a **critical review** of a selected topic and population and a brief research proposal). Each class (except the first) will consist of 1) discussion of readings, 2) additional background information on research provided

by the instructor, and 3) discussion of individual student projects.

Evaluation

Class presentation of readings (20%): Each student will present two assigned readings during the course. Students are expected to review, analyze, and synthesize the content of the reading, leading the class in a critical discussion. The presenter should post a brief summary of the reading on Carmen, including two discussion questions regarding the reading, by Saturday at 12 pm (noon). Other students must respond to these questions by Sunday at 12 pm (noon). The presenter will summarize the web discussion in class and will expand the discussion, bringing in issues not dealt with in the web discussion, if necessary. The presentation should be 25 minutes.

Mid-term: Critical Book Review (35%):

1. Explain/describe content of book for someone who has not read it, but has some knowledge of this area.
2. How does the author contextualize the study?
 - Where did it come from, i.e., *why* was the study done? This probably entails a theoretical framework, and possibly more pragmatic social issues. Is there a connection to the author's own life history?
 - What population was studied? Is it representative of a larger population? What is interesting about its specificity?
3. What methods were used in the study?
 - For data gathering: Participant-observation? Interviews (formal and/or informal)? Tape recording? Video recording? Other?
 - For analysis: Interpretation (always), but with what kinds of Agrounding@? Discourse analysis? Quotations from those studied? Practices as examples of a general pattern?
4. Does the author place him-or herself within the frame of the study? If so, how is this done? If not, why not? Either way, how does this choice affect the presentation of the study?
5. What are the strengths of the study? What are the weaknesses?
6. What did you learn from this study that you did not already know?
7. How does the study relate to this course and to the concepts studied in it?

Final Paper--Critical Review and Research Proposal (45%): For this assignment, students should identify a community in which they will do research (during part II of course in Winter 2009). Once the population is identified, students should gather descriptive information about the group, e.g., from Census data, previous research, or other sources of historical or demographic data. A synthesis and critical review of previous studies should follow the description; this critical synthesis should be based on a thorough review of the research literature on the chosen population (and topic) and should end with as yet unanswered research questions. The final paper itself should end with a brief research proposal that would explore the research questions. The proposal should include research topic and questions, participants, and methods for gathering and analyzing data:

- Topic and population (Introduction)
- Reason(s) you chose this particular topic (Rationale)
- How you plan to explore the topic (e.g., interview, recording or participant-observation) or what data resources you will use for your research (Methodology)
- Specific questions you would like to answer through your research (Research Questions and Sub-questions, if appropriate)
- Resources relevant to your project (e.g., a list of readings, video/audio data, websites). For this, use the guidance on how to search library resources by the librarian. In order to generate the references, you can use [RefWorks](#), an online personal database and bibliography creator provided by the OSU library. *You can obtain more guidance and information about how to search for resources or how to use the software in additional sessions with the librarian (by appointment).

Class Meetings and Assigned Readings

9/29/08

10/6/08

10/13/08

10/20/08

10/27/08

11/3/08

11/10/08

11/17/08

11/24/08

12/1/08

Introduction to Language, Society, & Culture: Communicative Competence, Ethnographic Methods and Perspectives, Oral Genres, and Literacy Practices

Linguistic Anthropology / Sociolinguistic Ethnography; Chapters 1-2, Saville-Troike and Introduction and Hymes (2) in Duranti; Preface and Chapter 1, Farr

Sociolinguistic Relativity; Chapter 3, Saville-Troike; Morgan (3), Mitchell-Kernan (6), and Whorf (15) in Duranti

Speech Communities and Communicative Events; Chapter 4, Saville-Troike; Gumperz (1), Philips (12), and Baquedano-López (14) in Duranti

Ethnography: Including Historical, Spatial and Social Contexts; Chapters 2-4, Farr; Book Reviews Presented

Different Ways with Language: Patterns and Attitudes across Populations; Chapters 5-6, Saville-Troike; Chapters 5-6, Farr

Verbal Art and Social Life; Bauman (7) in Duranti and Chapters 7-8, Farr

Language Socialization; Chapter 7, Saville-Troike; Ochs & Schieffelin (11) and Heath (13) in Duranti

Language and Power; Chapters 8-9, Saville-Troike; Gal (18) and Hill (20) in Duranti

Implications of Ethnographies of Communication; Chapter 9, Farr Final Student Papers Due