V14.0320: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY
MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY
9:30 AM – 10:45 AM
ROOM 25WV 706
4.0 CREDITS

Professor Sonia Das
Office: Rufus D. Smith Hall #710
Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM and by appointment
sd99@nyu.edu
212-992-7476

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the role of language in the construction of social identities. By thinking about identity as a process of “becoming” rather than “being”, we can analyze how speakers enact, legitimate, and contest their culturally specific subject positions through communicative interactions and discourses. Topics to be explored include the formation of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, nationality, diaspora, and religious identities. By the end of the semester, we will have learned new ways of thinking about the relationship between language, culture, and society and gained new insights into processes of social reproduction and cultural/linguistic change.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS


**All other readings are available on Blackboard.**
ASSIGNMENTS

Participation/Discussion Facilitation (15%): You are expected to discuss all assigned readings and participate in all classroom activities. Students with disabilities or other circumstances affecting their ability to attend class regularly or participate in discussions should speak to me privately at the beginning of the semester. Also, you will work in pairs to facilitate a class discussion. Feel free to get creative about your presentation; however, you should at least present the readings’ main points (~10-15 minutes), provide discussion questions for the class (~2-3 questions), and organize and run the discussion (~45 minutes). Student-led discussions will be held on the following dates:

- September 22: Hall (2005); Queen (1997) (2 students)
- September 29: Harding (1987); Kulick (1998) (2 students)
- October 6: Fader (Ch. 2) (1 student)
- October 18: Fader (Ch. 5, 6) (2 students)
- October 25: Fader (Ch. 7, Coda) (2 students)
- November 1: Hirschfeld and Gelman (1997); Bucholtz (2001) (2 students)
- November 10: Heath (1982); Milroy (2000); Cavanaugh (2005) (3 students)
- November 17: Mendoza (Ch. 1, 2) (2 students)
- November 24: Mendoza (Ch. 3, 4) (2 students)
- December 1: Mendoza (Ch. 5, 6) (2 students)

Reflection Essay: Before and After (10%): You will write an essay (2-3 pages) at the beginning and end of the semester reflecting on your personal social identities and experiences of language.

Current Events Analysis (10%): Choose an article from a credible news source that discusses an issue pertaining to language and gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, or race. You will then critique this article from an anthropological standpoint by writing an essay (3-4 pages) discussing whether the author is biased in his/her understanding of language and identity and providing an alternative explanation of the current event.

Mini-Ethnography (25%): You will work in groups of four to conduct ethnographic research on language and social identity in a New York City neighborhood of your choice. For data, you may analyze interviews, conversations, performances, newspapers, store signs, websites, etc. On the last day of class, each student will submit an individually written report (4-6 pages) describing their ethnography and each group will collaboratively present their findings to the class in an oral and visual format. A representative of each group must meet with me during office hours (before October 18th) to approve their choice of topic.

Reading Questions (20%): Each week you will be provided with a set of reading questions. You must submit short answers (~1 page) for at least 5 sets of reading questions during the semester. It is up to you to decide when to complete this assignment (although I strongly encourage you to not wait until the end of the semester!). Bring a print copy of your response to me at the beginning of class before discussion on Monday.

Scheduled Quizzes (20%): You will take an in-class quiz on Mitzvah Girls and Homegirls. This quiz will be comprised of multiple-choice questions and a short answer question.
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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Facilitation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay: Before</td>
<td>Sep. 15</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay: After</td>
<td>Dec. 13</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Events Analysis</td>
<td>Nov. 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mini-Ethnography Topic Approval</td>
<td>Oct. 18</td>
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<td>Mini-Ethnography Report</td>
<td>Dec. 15</td>
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<td>Mini-Ethnography Presentation</td>
<td>Dec. 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiz #1 – Mitzvah Girls</td>
<td>Oct. 27</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiz #2 – Homegirls</td>
<td>Dec. 8</td>
<td>10%</td>
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**POLICIES**

All essays must be typed in double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point font. Also, essays must adhere to the scholarly standards and styles of the American Anthropological Association ([http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.pdf](http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.pdf)) and must be submitted to www.turnitin.com, an on-line database used to determine cases of Internet plagiarism. Plagiarism will be dealt with most severely. When in doubt, cite.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**September 8: Introduction**

**September 13-15: Language and Ethnicity**


**DUE: Reflection Essay: Before**

**September 20-22: Language, Gender, and Sexuality**


**September 27-29: Language and Religion**


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**ETHNOGRAPHY #1: Mitzvah Girls**

**October 4-6**


FILM: *Being Myself* (unpublished)

**October 13 (No class on the 11th)**


FILM: Selections from *Jesus Camp* (2006).

**October 14: Optional**

⇒ Lecture by Dr. Ayala Fader (Fordham University) on "What do Middle-Aged Hasidic Women Want? Self-Help Cassettes and Everyday Ethics" (5 – 6:30 PM at 1 Washington Place, Jerry H. Labowitz Theatre for the Performing Arts).

**October 18**


**October 20: Guest Lecture by Dr. Ayala Fader (Fordham University)**

**October 25-27**


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**QUIZ #1: Mitzvah Girls**
November 1-3: Language and Race


November 8: Guest lecture by Dr. Christina Davis (University of Michigan)

November 10: Language and Class


DUE: Current Events Analysis

**ETHNOGRAPHY #2: Homegirls**

November 15-17


FILM: Selections from *Do you speak American?* (2005)

November 22-24


FILM: Selections from *Multilingual Hong Kong* (2005).

Nov. 29-Dec. 1

December 6-8


**QUIZ #2: Homegirls**

December 13: Language, Migration, and Diaspora


DUE: Reflection Essay: After

December 15: Mini-ethnography Group Presentations

DUE: Mini-ethnography