

**Linguistics 2B:  
Empirical Methods  
Sociolinguistics & Language Variation  
February-March 2007**

**Outline of this section in the course**

**Aims and objectives**

At the end of this section of Linguistics 2, you should be able to:

- ∞ Identify variation in language;
- ∞ Describe in precise terms how the variation is realised (answer questions like *What is a variable? What are variants of a variable?*);
- ∞ Give examples of different kinds of quantitative methods that can be used to study variation in spontaneous language;
- ∞ Say how patterns of variation in the group and the individual relate to broader sociolinguistic generalisations;
- ∞ Explain what makes a study reliable;
- ∞ Apply this knowledge in your own study of variation.

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Miriam's Office Hours: Thursday 3-4pm and t.b.a.

**Course Secretary:** Position vacant at time of writing (Sept 07)  
prehonsec@ling.ed.ac.uk.

Secretary's Office: G.01, 14 Buccleuch Place.

The main office opening hours are posted on the door. Please note that the office is usually closed Wednesday mornings for PPLS admin meetings.

## Readings

Meyerhoff, Miriam. 2006. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. London: Routledge (Taylor & Francis).

Several of the tutorial exercises are based on (or the same as) ones in the required text. If you don't have the required text, you'll be at a distinct disadvantage in the tut.

Recommended supplementary text:

Llamas, Carmen, Louise Mullany & Peter Stockwell (eds). 2007. *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*. London: Routledge (Taylor & Francis).

There are a few short survey articles that may be useful.

There will also be the occasional one-off reading; these will go on WebCT.

## Workload

Lx 2B is a 20 credit course. I have designed this section of the course on the assumption that you will be spending **10-12 hours per week** on it (this includes: coming to class; preparing for class; doing homework; analysing data; finding relevant supplementary readings; ad hoc meetings with your group).

If you hope to get a high mark in this part of the course, you will almost certainly spend more time on it.

## Topics Covered in the Course

The lectures will work through the following topics:

- ☞ *How sociolinguistics (social dialectology) grew out of regional dialectology*
- ☞ *How sociolinguists identify what is varying in language and have shown that "free variation" isn't as "free" as it looks.*
- ☞ *What methods sociolinguists use for gathering data and why you can't just ask people about variation.*
- ☞ *How linguistic and social factors constrain variation: words classes, style; age and sex of speaker.*
- ☞ *How variation may relate to language change (but doesn't have to): stable variables vs changes in progress.*
- ☞ *The effect that the people we hang out with (our networks) have on the way we talk.*
- ☞ *How to write up a small study of language variation.*