

LING 7800 – Social Semiotic Theory
Syllabus, Spring 2020

Instructor: Jeremy Calder
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Class: Wednesdays 1-3:30pm, Hellems 285
Office Hours: M 1:30-3:30pm, Hellems 164A

Course Description and Objectives

Semiotics is the study of signs, how they are used, and how they are interpreted. What is a sign? What are the components of a sign? How do people use signs in social and linguistic practice and what purpose do these signs serve? What are the connections between objects and social meanings and how do these connections arise and transform? How do social meanings of signs stem from and transform social and cultural practice more broadly?

This course will engage with key topics and concepts in the study of semiotic theory—e.g., indexicality, iconicity, enregisterment, embodiment, agency— and how these topics bear on research in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. We will read key works in the field and engage in critical discussions. Finally, each of you will complete a final independent research project engaging with one or more of the topics in the course and present this work to your peers in a conference-style format.

Required Texts

There is no required textbook. Readings will be provided on Canvas.

Course structure

Each class meeting, we will be engaging with a key topic or concept in semiotic theory. You should read the readings prior to each class and submit reading responses on Canvas the night before each class meeting. At the beginning of each class, we will start with a short free-writing exercise, giving you time to write out any last-minute thoughts or feelings you have about the topics or readings, or to give you time to write out any thoughts you might have regarding your final project. Following this, you will take time to workshop your weekly reading responses with your peers. Then, our weekly discussion facilitators will give a short presentation on the readings and topics and open up the floor to class discussion. This discussion will take up the bulk of each class period.

Grade Distribution

Participation: discussion, free writing, peer review	20%
Reading responses	20%
Discussion leading	30%
Final presentation	30%

Requirements

Participation. (20%)

Discussion: This is a discussion-driven course. In order to get the most out of the material, you are expected to attend each class meeting, complete the readings for each topic **prior to the start of class**, and engage in discussions. If you need to miss class for any reason, you should let me know in a timely and reasonable manner.

Free writing: At the beginning of each course, we will spend about 10 minutes free writing. You can use this time to write about any of the following:

- any last-minute thoughts or feelings that may have been sparked by the readings or theoretical concepts
- how the readings or topics from this week relate to readings or topics from other weeks
- any questions you have about the reading or anything you didn't understand
- how the topics may apply to a project you are working on
- any ideas related to your final projects.

Peer review: After the free-writing exercise, we will break into pairs or groups of three for a peer review exercise. You will share your weekly reading responses (more information on these below) with others in your group and workshop these. You are expected to workshop the reading responses of the others in your group each week.

Reading Responses. (20%)

Prior to each class meeting, you should submit a two-page response to the readings for that week via Canvas. These responses will be **due at 8pm the Tuesday night before each class**. In addition, you should bring 2 or 3 hard copies of your reading responses to class to be workshopped by your peers. Reading responses should not just be a summary of each reading, but should engage critically with the readings and put the readings in conversation with each other. For example:

- *What are the main points the author(s) are making, and how do they compare with each other?*
- *What assumptions are being made by the author(s)?*
- *Where do the readings align with and diverge from each other?*
- *Do you have a critique of any of the arguments or methods?*
- *How do the topics of the readings bear on your own work?*

Discussion Leading. (30%)

You will choose two topics from the syllabus and **serve as discussion facilitator twice over the semester**. There will be about 2 facilitators per topic. As facilitators, you should prepare a short (20-minute) presentation with your partner to kick off the discussion. These presentations should engage critically with the topics and readings for that week. Following the presentation, we will open up the discussion to the class. You should guide the class discussion with questions, activities, data sets, etc. I am happy to meet with you before your presentations if you have any questions or concerns or need guidance. *You are exempt from turning in reading responses the weeks you are discussion facilitator.*

Final presentation (30%)

For your final project, you will write and present a conference-style presentation engaging with the topics in the course. The final project should be your own independent research. There are two parts to this assignment:

(1) you will write a **500-word abstract** for your project to be submitted in Week 12. You should submit your abstracts via Canvas by 8pm the Tuesday night before class on Week 12. Bring printed copies of this abstract to class and we will workshop them in class.

(2) You will give a **15-minute presentation** on your project in one of the final two class meetings. Following each presentation, we will have a 5-minute period for the class to ask questions about your project.

E-Mail Policies

Please feel free to contact me via e-mail with any questions, concerns, or if you need to schedule a meeting outside of the regular office hours. I will respond to your e-mail by the following business day.

Late Assignments

Given that the weekly discussions and activities depend upon the completion of your weekly reading responses, I am unable to accept any reading responses after the class period we will be workshopping them. I highly encourage you to submit all of your responses to Canvas by the deadline of 8pm, the Tuesday night before each class. However, I will accept late submissions of responses as long as they are submitted before the start of class, with a 50% penalty. Final project abstracts are subject to the same policies as reading responses. Finally, as your final projects will be presented in class, I am unable to accept any late arrangements for these.

Accommodation for Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.

Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make

appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Honor Code

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, exploitation, harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking), discrimination, and harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#). Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

Religious Holidays

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. **Please let the instructor know at least two weeks in advance of a potential conflict to schedule alternative arrangements.** See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Disclaimer

Syllabus, course schedule, and readings are subject to change at the professor's discretion. We may spend longer or shorter on a particular topic depending upon class interest in each topic. Any changes to the syllabus or schedule will be e-mailed to the class and updated on Canvas, so be sure to check and read all e-mails I send to the class, and check Canvas regularly!

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1 – January 15

- **Syllabus and intro to the course: what is semiotics?**

Week 2 – January 22

- **What is a sign?**
 - Peirce 1868. On a new list of categories.
 - Everaert-Desmedt 2011. Peirce's semiotics.
 - Gal & Irvine 2019, Ch 3. Ingredients: signs, conjectures, perspectives. In *Signs of Difference*.

Week 3 – January 29

- **Indexicality in linguistics and linguistic anthropology**
 - Silverstein 1976. Shifters, linguistic categories and cultural description.
 - Lyons 1982. Deixis and subjectivity: loquor, ergo sum?
 - Hanks 1999. Indexicality.

Week 4 – February 5

- **Orders of indexicality and the indexical field**
 - Silverstein 2003. Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life.
 - Johnstone 2006. Mobility, indexicality, and the enregisterment of "Pittsburghese".
 - Eckert 2008. Variation and the indexical field.

Week 5 – February 12

- **Indirect indexicality and indexical inversion**
 - Ochs 1993. Indexing gender.
 - Inoue 2003. The listening subject of Japanese modernity.
 - Inoue 2004. What does language remember?

Week 6 – February 19

- **Qualia and qualisigns**
 - Chumley & Harkness 2013. Introduction: Qualia.
 - Harkness 2013. Softer soju in South Korea.
 - Harkness 2017. The open throat: deceptive sounds, facts of firstness, and the interactional emergence of voice.

Week 7 – February 26

- **Iconicity / rhematization**
 - Gal 2013. Tastes of talk: qualia and the moral flavor of signs.
 - Zhang 2008. Rhotacization and the 'Beijing smooth operator': the social meaning of a linguistic variable.
 - Gal & Irvine 2019, Ch 4. Comparison: the semiotics of differentiation. In *Signs of Difference*.

Week 8 – March 4

- **Scale and style**
 - Irvine 2001. ‘Style’ as distinctiveness.
 - Carr & Lempert 2016. Introduction: Pragmatics of scale.
 - Gal 2016. Scale-making: comparison and perspective as ideological projects.

Week 9 – March 11

- **The interpretant and (socio)linguistic perception**
 - Kockleman 2017. Agency: the relation between meaning, power, and knowledge.
 - D’Onofrio forthcoming. Sociolinguistic signs as cognitive representations.
 - McGown & Babel forthcoming. Perceiving isn’t believing.

Week 10 – March 18

- **Enregisterment, emblems, and figures of personhood**
 - Agha 2003. The social life of cultural value.
 - Agha 2004. Registers of language.
 - Agha 2007, Ch 5. Regrouping identity. In *Language and social relations*.

Week 11 – No class (Spring break)

Week 12 – April 1

- **Final project abstracts due! We will workshop these in class!**
 - No readings due to SLA / CLASP. Just bring your abstracts!

Week 13 – April 8

- **Multi-modality and embodiment**
 - Pratt 2018. Embodying toughness: LOT-raising, /l/-velarization, and retracted articulatory setting.
 - Calder 2019. The fierceness of fronted /s/: linguistic rhematization through visual transformation.
 - Pratt 2019. Embodying ‘tech’: phonetic variation, articulatory retraction, and social meaning.

Week 14 – April 15

- **Semiotics and agency**
 - Kockelman 2017. Semiotic agency.
 - Calder 2019. From ‘sissy’ to ‘sickening’: the indexical landscape of /s/ in SoMa, San Francisco.
 - Parish & Hall 2020. Agency.

Week 15 – April 22

- **Final presentations 1**

Week 16 – April 29

- **Final presentations 2**