

**COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS**  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology

**➤ ANTH 299-F04**  
**➤➤ Linguistic**  
**➤➤➤ Anthropology**  
**➤➤➤ Fall 2023**

**Instructor:** Doug Bafford  
**Email:** [dbafford@holycross.edu](mailto:dbafford@holycross.edu)  
**Class Meeting Times:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:30-7:45 PM  
**Class Meeting Location:** Beaven Hall 113

**Office Hours:** Mondays 3:00-4:00 PM, Wednesdays 10:00-11:00 AM, and by appointment Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays  
**Office Location:** Beaven Hall 230



(a) <Right hand (RH) at rest at right hip>  
*En valī*  
My way



(b) <RH: [1] – moves left to left hip, [2] – rapidly sweeps right across body> (1.5)



(c) <RH index finger/wrist moves [1] up then [2] down: ... zenith ... nadir of the stroke>  
*tani: valī*  
unique way



(d) <RH index finger/wrist waves [1] right, [2] left, then [3] right: ... R-most L-most R-most edge of the stroke> (0.8)  
*Mara- kkā- tīnka*  
forget- INF. NEG.IMPl

'My way/path is a unique way/path. Don't forget (it)!'

**Course Information:**

*Course Description*

This course provides an introduction to the methods and tools of linguistic anthropology, one of the discipline's four principal subfields in the American tradition. With contemporary and historical primary sources along with theoretical texts, we will consider how spoken language and its representation in other modalities become mechanisms through which differences of class, region, race, ethnicity, and sexuality are produced and contested. A basic premise of the course is that language functions as far more than a mere neutral medium to denote ideas but actively shapes our identities and the material conditions of our lives. The techniques of semiotic analysis, which we will develop through ethnographic case studies drawn from diverse cultural settings, will allow for nuanced insights into how modes of communication shape the complex lived experience of public discourse, media, performance, the political sphere, religious and magical language, temporality, personhood, stigmatized speech, and language ideology. The role of language in constructing epistemic authority and legitimizing the social order will be central themes. The semester will conclude with applied independent research into language use in specific cultural contexts through the presentation of original linguistic data.

### *Prerequisites*

There are no formal prerequisites. However, those with little familiarity with anthropology should be prepared to read extra materials in the first couple weeks of the semester to help orient themselves.

### *Course Materials*

The following books are required for full participation in the course. They are available at the Holy Cross bookstore and on reserve at the library, but you can also find them online through most major retailers. Feel free to procure them in whatever format, print or electronic, you prefer. All other course materials will be available on Canvas.

Courtney Handman. 2014. *Critical Christianity: Translation and Denominational Conflict in Papua New Guinea*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Norma Mendoza-Denton. 2008. *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice Among Latina Youth Gangs*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

### *Learning Goals*

By the end of this course, you should be able to

- Explain how everyday speech reveals information about social structure, demographics, and cultural values
- Document regional language varieties through in-person fieldwork and close attention to detail
- Analyze the social significance of language use through ethnographic case studies and the techniques of semiotics
- Apply empirical insights to address questions of public policy
- Lead interactive workshop sessions through the organization and presentation of relevant linguistic data in an effective and compelling way
- Evaluate the reliability of empirical studies and question the assumptions and limitations of scientific knowledge production

### ***Assignments and Coursework:***

In addition to regularly assigned readings due before most class meetings, you will develop the core skills of linguistic anthropological work through four projects, three of which we will work on collectively for approximately one month each, and one that you will complete at a pre-arranged time during the semester, basic details about each of which appear below.

### *Listening in Worcester*

This assignment gives you an opportunity to collect and analyze examples of natural speech patterns and their social significance. You will travel to a public location in Worcester, where you will listen to ambient conversations for a couple hours and document salient elements of “language in use”: from code choice, grammatical features, and dialect to interactional patterns and communicative expressions. Using a combination of written, auditory, and other media, you will produce a report that presents a vignette of

verbal life in Worcester, gesturing toward the potential linguistic significance of the everyday (or out-of-the-ordinary) phenomena you encounter.

### *Language Policy Brief*

You will apply some of the findings of linguistic anthropologists to intervene into a practical dilemma related to language policy. In a short policy brief, you will draw on empirical data and the perspective of language scientists to recommend a concrete action plan to a municipality, board, organization, or other governing institution. Using at least two texts from our course syllabus, you will present evidence for why specific actions ought to be taken or opposed. You are free to choose any issue related to language policy, and several examples and sources of sample language policies will be available on Canvas.

### *Case Study in Intercultural Communication*

In the final weeks of the course, you will apply what you have learned about the techniques of linguistic anthropology to produce an independently researched case study of some form of cross-cultural communication. You are free to choose your own topic as long as it involves close analysis of at least one communicative channel (spoken language, gestures, writing, other symbols, etc.) and some of the technical skills we have developed throughout the course. Your research will involve either drawing on a pre-existing corpus of documented language use or collecting original examples. Depending on the medium you are writing about, your final project may take various forms, which you will discuss with the instructor early in the research process and which may range from a transcriptional breakdown to a visual tableau or a podcast. You will also share the results of your work with your colleagues in the last week of the semester in a brief, formal presentation.

### *Linguistics Workshop*

Starting in week three, part of each class meeting will be devoted to a fifteen-minute interactive workshop led by one student. After signing up for one of these sessions, you will locate real-life illustrations of the linguistic questions under study and explain how they could be understood from the perspective of the course texts. You should share either transcribed or audio recorded versions of your linguistic data and provide a few examples for the rest of the class to work through and discuss collaboratively. You will be evaluated on the basis of the thoroughness of the presentation and your ability to guide our inquiry in a productive, engaged way.

### *Engagement and Collegiality*

Engagement with others throughout the semester is expected as a basic requirement of the course. This class demands active participation, questioning, and response within the small scholarly community we are forming through weekly meetings. A prerequisite to this level of sustained engagement is your presence in the classroom, but physical presence alone is not sufficient to ensure that you will meet these course expectations. This expected level of engagement starts with solid preparation before each meeting so that you will be in a position to contribute to the discussion and, most importantly, ask relevant questions to clarify points of uncertainty that arose as you began your study of the week's written materials. During each linguistics workshop, you will also be expected to pose questions in response to the day's speaker and participate in the exercises assigned. Your engagement and participation with these

sessions will constitute a major component of your own engagement and collegiality score over the semester.

That being said, I understand that outgoing conversation or debate is not a style suited to all learners. Therefore, if you feel you are not able to participate rigorously during class, please let me know so that we can figure out an alternative mode of participation, whether through office hour visits or other activities. Similarly, I realize that unexpected things may come up during the semester (e.g., illness, family concerns, etc.) that may prevent you from attending our meetings. Therefore, I encourage you to come to see me during office hours (or another time by appointment or virtually) to talk about the course content that you missed, which will ensure you do not fall behind and can apply missed content into your coursework and in future class discussion.

### *Submitting Written Assignments*

All written assignments prepared outside of class should be fully documented with consistent use of a citation style. American anthropologists typically follow the Chicago Manual of Style (author-date version) as a disciplinary convention, and you are welcome to use the same in this course. However, if you are more familiar with another style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.) and would prefer to use it, you can as long as you do so consistently. The most important point is that you give clear references to outside texts and ideas you have borrowed, even if the texts have been assigned in class. Resources to help you develop good citation practices are available online at the [library's citation guide](#) and in person at the Writer's Workshop on the second floor of the Dinand Library. You are strongly recommended to visit the Writer's Workshop to improve the quality of your academic writing, especially given the writing-intensive nature of this course. You can [visit their website](#) to schedule a free forty-five-minute appointment, to which you should bring a copy of the assignment and your current draft.

For each day (or portion thereof) that a written assignment is late, your grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter (e.g., from B+ to a B). Extensions are granted *automatically* for circumstances outside your control equal to the number of study days lost, **provided you let me know ahead of the due date**. Do not hesitate to reach out by email if you are having trouble meeting deadlines or other targets. Each essay should be double-spaced and formatted with a reasonably sized font and page margins, with extra space between paragraphs removed. You should also try to produce an original title for each submission (e.g., not simply "Language Policy Brief"). Please remember to read through your entire draft at least once before submitting it. If you would like to rewrite an assignment to try for a higher grade, you can always see me during office hours to make individual arrangements and to discuss your plans for revision. In most cases, you may request a grade that is the average of the old and new scores. There are no other opportunities to earn extra credit.

### *Grading and Evaluation*

You will be evaluated based on the quality of your assignments, the degree of improvement throughout the semester, and the value of your participation to our community of inquiry. Each of these components of the course will be weighted as follows in the calculation of your final course grade:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Listening in Worcester .....               | 20% |
| Language Policy Brief .....                | 20% |
| Case Study Documents and Presentation..... | 25% |
| Linguistics Workshop .....                 | 20% |
| Engagement and Collegiality .....          | 15% |

Your work will be evaluated in each of these categories according to the following scale, which is set by the College:

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| A..... | Excellent (for exceptional and innovative work)    |
| A-     |  |
| B+     |  |
| B..... | Good (for thoughtful work that meets expectations) |
| B-     |  |
| C+     |  |
| C..... | Satisfactory (for acceptable work)                 |
| C-     |  |
| D+     |  |
| D..... | Low Pass (for poor work)                           |
| F..... | Failing Grade                                      |

### ***Logistics and Resources:***

#### *Course Policies*

In order to create the most effective learning environment possible and for the consideration of your fellow students, I ask that we all follow these simple guidelines while in class:

1. Arrive on-time having read the assigned materials and completed any relevant tasks or preparation for that day. The content you are expected to learn will come both from reading and activities completed outside of class time and additional material brought out during lectures and discussions. You will get the most out of the course if you keep up with the workload as you go rather than leaving everything for when assignments are due. In order not to disturb others in the class, you should try to arrive before the completion of our opening ritual.
2. Avoid distractions from electronic devices. This course demands your full presence, undistracted by concerns outside the room, and your time in class won't be worthwhile unless you commit yourself to paying attention to what we are doing. If you are relying on a device during class time for notetaking, you should aim to access only those programs that are immediately relevant to course topics so as not to distract yourself. As a common courtesy, this simple step will also avoid disrupting those around you who will inevitably watch your screens from the periphery.

3. Always have something on which to write notes in front of you. You are free to use whatever medium you prefer, but try to jot down not just what I have to say in class but what your classmates share in discussion, all of which may be used in your assignments (and the notes about which will be invaluable in your studying).
4. Allow for an atmosphere of respectful academic discourse. This course covers potentially controversial social topics on which many people (including me) have strong opinions. Try your best to debate respectfully and sympathetically, even when you disagree with your classmates or with me. We want to allow everyone to express his or her perspective in a supportive yet academically critical setting. You may find it helpful to think of our job as to debate *ideas*, not other people.
5. Ask questions about anything (technical concepts, terms, background, etc.) you do not know or are unsure of. Even if it seems like a silly question, chances are that other people have the same uncertainty, and you will help others by asking it. This is especially important given the various backgrounds and degrees of familiarity with linguistics and different languages that each of us brings to the course. Our collective goal is to learn from one another by asking questions about languages and cultures we may be unfamiliar with.
6. If you have concerns with anything in the course, please see me as soon as possible. Troubles that build over the course of the semester become more difficult to address; it will be much easier to deal with them as early on as possible. I am always available to find a solution that works best for you, regardless of what issues come up.
7. Regularly scheduled office hours are available on a first-come, first-served basis. I will meet with everyone who shows up during my office hours (listed at the top of the syllabus, unless modified by prior email announcement) in order of arrival. If your schedule is limited and you can only meet at a specific time, email me in advance to reserve a spot. You can also send an email to arrange a time outside of my regularly scheduled hours if they don't work for you. I am on campus virtually the entire day on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

### *Intellectual Risk Taking*

One of the most important skills we will cultivate this semester is the habit of making bold moves in your thinking. Practically speaking, boldness entails suggesting alternative ideas that you may not be entirely sure about, exposing them to scrutiny along with your own cherished positions and assumptions. Never be afraid to ask questions, even if you think they are simple or head in a different direction from what we had been discussing. Even in formally graded assignments, you are encouraged to think imaginatively and not always worry about having the “correct” position or interpretation. While you should always strive to support your arguments with good evidence, there is value in testing out explanations that may at first seem counterintuitive or speculative.

### *Students with Disabilities*

Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should reach out as early in the semester as possible to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Office of Accessibility Services in Hogan Campus Center Room 505 or by phone at 508-793-3693 to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### *Academic Integrity*

All education is a cooperative enterprise between faculty and students. This cooperation requires trust and mutual respect, which are only possible in an environment governed by the principles of academic integrity. As an institution devoted to teaching, learning, and intellectual inquiry, Holy Cross expects all members of the College community to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any violation of academic integrity undermines the student-faculty relationship, thereby wounding the whole community. The principal violations of academic integrity are plagiarism, cheating, and collusion. See the [full academic integrity policy](#) for more details.

### *Audio Recording*

If you feel it is in your best interest to record our conversations as a means to understand/process the ideas introduced in class and share them with wider audiences, you may do so for any use.

### *Religious Observances*

Any student who faces a conflict between the requirements of this course and the observance of his or her religious faith should contact me as early in the semester as possible. In such event, I will provide reasonable and fair accommodations that do not unduly disadvantage you.

### ***Course Schedule:***

| <i>Week/Central Question</i>  | <i>Class Session</i> | <i>Reading/Assignments Due</i> |
|---|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Week 1:</b> How can we study language, and what does it tell us about society? | <b>August 30</b>     | None                           |

### Unit I: An Expanded Vocabulary

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|--|--------------------|---|
| <b>Week 2:</b> What functions does language serve, and how is it structured? | <b>September 4</b> | Syllabus<br><br>Dell H. Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking"<br><br>H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation"<br><br>J.L. Austin, <i>How to Do Things with Words</i> |
|  | <b>September 6</b> | Richard Parmentier, "Semiotic Anthropology"<br><br>Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Linguistics and Anthropology," <i>Structural Anthropology</i>                          |

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|---|---------------------|--|
| <b>Week 3:</b> What are the relationships between language, thought, and culture? | <b>September 11</b> | Benjamin Lee Whorf, “The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language”<br><br>Harold Conklin, “Hanunóo Color Categories”  |
|   | <b>September 13</b> | John McWhorter, “Studies Have Shown,” <i>The Language Hoax</i>   |
| <b>Week 4:</b> How does dialect vary according to social stratification?          | <b>September 18</b> | William Labov, “Phonological Correlates of Social Stratification”<br><br>William Labov, “How I Got into Linguistics, and What I Got Out of It”   |
|   | <b>September 20</b> | Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Introduction and Chapters 7-8   |
| <b>Week 5:</b> How can we study culture through language?                         | <b>September 25</b> | Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Chapters 1-2  |
|   | <b>September 27</b> | Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Chapter 9<br><br>Laura C. Hartley, “The Consequences of Conflicting Stereotypes: Bostonian Perceptions of U.S. Dialects”<br><br><b><i>Submit</i></b> Listening in Worcester |
| <b>Week 6:</b> How do systems of signs guide social interaction?                  | <b>October 2</b>    | Erving Goffman, “Footing”<br><br>Judith T. Irvine, “Shadow Conversations: The Indeterminacy of Participant Roles”  |
|   | <b>October 4</b>    | Constantine V. Nakassis, “Rajini’s Finger, Indexicality, and the Metapragmatics of Presence”<br><br>Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Chapter 6   |



Unit II: Ethnographies of Communication

|  |                   |   |
|--|-------------------|---|
| <b>Week 7:</b> How do people think language works?               | <b>October 16</b> | Judith Irvine and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation”<br><br>Webb Keane, “On Semiotic Ideology”   |
|  | <b>October 18</b> | Michael Herzfeld, “National Spirit or the Breath of Nature? The Expropriation of Folk Positivism in the Discourse of Greek Nationalism”<br><br>Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Chapter 4 |
| <b>Week 8:</b> How are sacred texts translated?                  | <b>October 23</b> | Courtney Handman, <i>Critical Christianity</i> , Introduction and Chapter 2   |
|  | <b>October 25</b> | Nicholas Harkness, “The Limits of Language,” <i>Glossolalia and the Problem of Language</i><br><br>Courtney Handman, <i>Critical Christianity</i> , Chapter 3                                     |
| <b>Week 9:</b> How does language participate in faith formation? | <b>October 30</b> | Tanya Luhrmann, “Why Prayer Works,” <i>How God Becomes Real</i><br><br>Courtney Handman, <i>Critical Christianity</i> , Chapter 5   |
|  | <b>November 1</b> | James S. Bielo, “‘Particles-to-People...Molecules-to-Man’: Creationist Poetics in Public Debates”<br><br><u>Submit</u> Language Policy Brief  |
| <b>Week 10:</b> Why can profanity be so dangerous?               | <b>November 6</b> | Janet McIntosh, “‘Tradition’ and Threat: Women’s Obscenity in Giriama Funerary Rituals”   |
|  | <b>November 8</b> | John H. McWhorter, “Introduction” and “Profanity and Shit,” <i>Nine Nasty W*rds: English in the Gutter: Then, Now, and Forever</i>  |

Unit III: Novel Applications

|   |                           |  |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| <p><b>Week 11:</b> How does political rhetoric construct the boundaries of acceptable discourse?</p>                                | <p><b>November 13</b></p> | <p>Janet McIntosh, “Crybabies and Snowflakes,” <i>Language in the Trump Era</i></p> <p>Adam Hodges, “Plausible Deniability,” <i>Language in the Trump Era</i></p>                        |
|   | <p><b>November 15</b></p> | <p>James Slotta, “The Annotated Donald Trump: Signs of Circulation in a Time of Bubbles”</p>   |
| <p><b>Week 12:</b> What can speech reveal about gender identity and sexuality?</p>  | <p><b>November 20</b></p> | <p>Jeremy Calder, “From ‘Gay Lisp’ to ‘Fierce Queen’: The Sociophonetics of Sexuality’s Most Iconic Variable”</p> <p>Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i>, Chapter 5</p>               |
| <p><b>Week 13:</b> How does language refract ideologies related to race, region, and colonialism?</p>                               | <p><b>November 27</b></p> | <p>Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, <i>Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature</i></p> <p>Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i>, Conclusion</p>                         |
|   | <p><b>November 29</b></p> | <p>Christine Mallinson and Becky Childs, “The Intersection of Regional and Ethnic Identity: African American English in Appalachia”</p> <p><u><i>Submit</i></u> Case Study Documents</p> |
| <p><b>Week 14:</b> What does an ethnographic approach to language teach us about social change and intercultural communication?</p> | <p><b>December 4</b></p>  | <p><u><i>Present</i></u> Case Study</p>  |
|   | <p><b>December 6</b></p>  | <p><u><i>Present</i></u> Case Study (continued)</p>  |

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**\*\*\*NB: This schedule and syllabus are subject to change as we move through the semester.\*\*\***

Source for image on first page: Constantine V. Nakassis, “Rajini’s Finger, Indexicality, and the Metapragmatics of Presence,” p. 223