

**What makes a word ‘real’?
The science behind *hangry*, *adorkable*, and other pop culture terms**

Arts and Sciences 1138

**Autumn 2018
Syllabus**

Instructor: Prof. Andrea Sims
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(accessible 8:30a-5p, M-F)
Office Hours:
and by appointment

Class Time: (55 min, once a week)
Class Location:

Course Description: Minutes before winning a 2018 Olympic gold medal in snowboarding, Chloe Kim tweeted that she was ‘hangry’. Is *hangry* a real word? (For that matter, what about *tweeted*?) Words associated with youth and pop culture are often dismissed as ‘just slang.’ But actually, these words reflect speakers’ unconscious knowledge of how their language works: its sound structure, word structure, and social uses. In this course we explore the nature of this knowledge. We will use examples drawn from pop culture as a window into the question: What makes a word ‘real’?

Course Objectives: Students will...

1. ... develop an understanding of some of the methods and goals of the field of linguistics.
2. ... be able to apply hypothesis-testing, and a scientific perspective more generally, to the investigation of language.
3. ... practice identifying interesting language data in everyday life.
4. ... develop an appreciation of the subtle intuitions that speakers have about ‘wordlikeness’.
5. ... be able to explain at a basic level how social, phonological and morphological factors together influence how speakers create new words.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Required Texts: You are not required to buy any texts for this course. All required readings will be available through Carmen.

Course Requirements

Reading and Discussion Board Participation: You should do each assigned reading before the date listed on the syllabus. And to help us jumpstart class discussions, you will contribute to the relevant Carmen discussion board every week that there is an assigned reading, based on that week’s reading. Your participation can take the form of a new question or comment, or a (thoughtful) response to an existing question/comment. But it should ideally be something that is suitable for discussion, not purely

a comprehension question. Discussion board comments/questions are due by 11:59pm the day before the relevant class.

Class Attendance and Participation: There will be very little lecturing (and few powerpoint presentations) in this class. While there is a topic for each class, class time will be spent mostly on discussion, based on the assigned readings and your language journal data. You are expected to actively contribute to class discussions on a weekly basis.

Language Journal: During the first eight weeks of the semester, you will keep a language journal in which you record ‘new words’ that you observe in your everyday life, along with the context in which you observed them. This data will become the basis for some of our class discussions, and for your presentation. You are expected to contribute to your journal on an ongoing basis; I will check the entries periodically (see the Course Schedule), but don’t wait until the deadline. We will talk about the format for the language journal early in the semester.

Presentation: You will give an 8-minute presentation to the class towards the end of the semester. For your presentation, you should pick one word (or phrase) that you recorded in your language journal and develop a presentation that explains how the word has been coined, from a linguistic point of view (e.g. its phonological structure, morphological structure, and sociolinguistic context – we will talk about what these terms mean across the course of the semester). Your presentation should include some independent research about the relevant linguistic issues. We will talk about expectations for the presentation at an appropriate point during the semester.

Grading

This class is graded on an S/U scale (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory). Grading will be by the following criteria:

Reading and Discussion Board Participation	25%
Class Attendance and Participation	25%
Language Journal	25%
Presentation	25%
Total	100%

Grading Scale:

S 75-100
U 0-74

Important Policies and Information

Academic Integrity: It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations.

Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (<https://trustees.osu.edu/index.php?q=rules/code-of-student-conduct/>).

Students with Special Needs: Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Ave.; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu>.

Diversity As a Core Value: The Ohio State University affirms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

Information about Counseling and Consultation Services: As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any of these conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life Counseling and Consultation Services (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling (614) 292- 5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at (614) 292-5766 and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Prevention Hotline at 1-(800)-273-TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Late Assignments: I reserve the right to not accept work that is turned in late. Class content will depend heavily on your language journal data and discussion board questions. It is therefore particularly important in this class that you do assignments on time – it will make class discussions better! If you need to request an extension, do so BEFORE the assignment is due.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Course intro; linguistics as the scientific study of language

Week 2 – New words all around us: The productive and ever-changing nature of language

Read: Trudgill (1998) and Aitchison (1998)

Week 3 – Why slang and other new words? The social life of language

Read: Bucholtz (2000) and Eble (2004)
Language journal check #1

Week 4 – The social life of language, ctd.

Read: Beckner et al. (2015)

Week 5 – Why do some words sound better than others? The phonological structure of English words

Read: Pierrehumbert (2014)
Language journal check #2

Week 6 – The phonological structure of English words, ctd.

Read: Jusczyk et al. (1993)

Week 7 – ‘You’re adorkable!’ Blends and acronyms in pop culture

Read: Brown (2008)
Language journal check #3

Week 8 – Why do some words sound better than others? The morphological structure of English words

Read: Zimmer et al. (2013)

Week 9 – The morphological structure of English words, ctd.

Read: Carson (2010)
Language journal check #4

Week 10 – How to bend the rules of word structure for creative effect: Memes and beyond

Read: Zimmer and Carson (2011)

Come talk to me about your presentation topic!

Week 11 – Internet culture around the world: How other languages ‘repurpose’ English word structure

Read: Balteiro (2012) and Zhang (2015)

Week 12 – Student presentations

No reading

Week 13 – Student presentations

No reading

Week 14 – Student presentations

No reading

Week 15 – What have we learned? Putting it all together

No reading

References

- Aitchison, Jean. 1998. “Myth 3: The media are ruining English.” In *Language myths*, ed. by Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill, 15-22. London: Penguin.
- Balteiro, Isabel. 2012. “When Spanish owns English words.” *English Today* 28(1): 9-14.
- Beckner, Clay, Péter Rácz, Jennifer Hay, Jürgen Brandstetter, and Christoph Bartneck. 2015. “Participants conform to humans but not to humanoid robots in an English past tense formation task.” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 35(2): 158-179.
- Brown, David W. 2008. “Paris Hilton, Brenda Frazier, blogs, and the proliferation of *celebu-*.” *American Speech* 83(3): 312-325.
- Bucholtz, Mary. 2000. “Language and youth culture.” *American Speech* 75(3): 280-283.
- Carson, Charles E. 2010. “Among the new words.” *American Speech* 85(3): 352-365.
- Eble, Connie. 2004. “Slang.” In *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. by Edward Finegan and John Rickford, 375-386. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jusczyk, P.W., A.D. Friederici, J.M. Wessels, V.Y. Svenkerud, and A.M. Jusczyk. 1993. “Infants’ sensitivity to the sound patterns of native language words.” *Journal of Memory and Language* 32(3): 402-420.
- Pierrehumbert, Janet. 2014. “Real words, possible words, and new words.” *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society* 36: 1866-1867.
- Trudgill, Peter. 1998. “Myth 1: The meanings of words should not be allowed to vary or change.” In *Language myths*, ed. by Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill, 1-8. London: Penguin.
- Zhang, Wei. 2015. “Multilingual creativity on China’s internet.” *World Englishes* 34(2): 231-246.
- Zimmer, Benjamin, and Charles E. Carson. 2011. “Among the new words.” *American Speech* 86(4): 454-479.
- Zimmer, Benjamin, Jane Solomon, and Charles E. Carson. 2013. “Among the new words.” *American Speech* 88(4): 467-488.