Course Information

Course Title: LOL That's Not Funny: Language change and Linguistic Creativity Online
Course Number: MLSC250
Term: Spring 2024
Credits: 3
Course Dates: July 14 - Aug 1
Course Times: MTWThF 9am-12pm
Final Exam Time: Aug 1, 9am
Classroom: TWS 1105

Professor: Emily Lord
Pronouns: she/her
Email: eslord@umd.edu
Office Hours: Wednesdays - 1-3pm (Zoom)
Office: Virtual

Course Description

Recent developments in technology, from texting to Zoom, have created radically new environments for human language use. Examining how communication in online environments is shaped by and responds to these developments allows us to see rapid cultural changes in linguistic practices and norms, and to analyze and appreciate humans' endless communicative ingenuity. At the same time, these changes generally exemplify well-established patterns of language change and variation, and can thus provide a window into sociolinguistic research methods and practices and broader generalizations about human language use.

This course will introduce students to the study of language variation and change through a survey of different types of online language use. How do speakers use and adapt language in new environments to meet their communicative goals? How do new words, grammatical constructions or writing practices emerge and spread through communities online? What role does the medium play in shaping the message? (For instance, texting often employs emoji to provide subtle emotional cues in the absence of body language and facial expressions.) How do the social values attached to language forms and varieties play out in online communication - including differences in language use by age, race, ethnicity, gender, and other elements of identity? And while we are all talking, who else is listening? We will conclude the course with a discussion of how the massive amounts of linguistic data available online are being used by researchers and companies to develop new technology and market products, and some of the ethical and practical implications of these uses.

Course Objectives

After successfully completing this course you will be able to:

● Understand introductory concepts in linguistics and the use of online communication in linguistic study.

- Think and write critically about topics related to linguistics, language change, and language use.

- Describe a variety of natural language processing tools and how they are used, and relate them to real-world examples.

Required Resources
- Course Website: elms.umd.edu

- McCulloch, Gretchen (2019). Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language. Riverhead Books. ISBN 9780735210943

- Additional readings will be posted to the course website.

This course is taught in-person. Class time will typically alternate between a lecture to introduce a core concept, and discussion section where students can relate these concepts to their own experiences, and delve deeper into real-world examples. Students can expect that Thursday classes will primarily be lectures, and Tuesday classes will primarily be discussion focused, although this is subject to change depending on the rate that we progress through the units.

Tips for Success

1. **Participate.** Discussions and group work are a critical part of the course. You can learn a great deal from discussing ideas and perspectives with your peers and professor. Participation can also help you articulate your thoughts and develop critical thinking skills.
2. **Manage your time.** Make time for your learning and participation in discussions each week. Give yourself plenty of time to complete assignments including extra time to handle any technology related problems.
3. **Do not fall behind.** This class moves at a quick pace and each week builds on the previous. It will be hard to keep up with the course content if you fall behind in the pre-work or post-work.
4. **Use ELMS-Canvas notification settings.** Canvas ELMS-Canvas can ensure you receive timely notifications in your email or via text. Be sure to enable announcements to be sent instantly or daily.
5. **Ask for help if needed.** If you need help with ELMS-Canvas or other technology, IT Support. If you are struggling with a course concept, reach out to me for support.

Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

Course-Specific Policies

Names/Pronouns and Self-Identifications
The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. I invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). The pronouns someone indicates are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity. Visit trans.umd.edu to learn more.

 Additionally, how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity, is your choice whether to disclose (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and I ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

Communication with Instructor:

Email: If you need to reach out and communicate with me, please message me through the ELMS messaging system. Please DO NOT message me with questions that are easily found in the syllabus or on ELMS (i.e. When is this assignment due? How much is it worth? etc.) but please DO reach out about personal, academic, and intellectual concerns/questions.
I will do my best to respond to all messages within 1 business day.

ELMS: I will send IMPORTANT announcements via ELMS messaging. You must make sure that your email & announcement notifications (including changes in assignments and/or due dates) are enabled in ELMS so you do not miss any messages. You are responsible for checking your email and Canvas/ELMS inbox with regular frequency.

Content Warning:

This course will discuss a variety of topics related to online communication and internet spaces. Topics discussed may be at times uncomfortable and examples may be included that contain vulgar language. Students are expected to engage with these topics in a respectful manner. Students will at times be asked to collect data from online sources. While I do my best to prevent students from interacting with potentially offensive content, social media content changes frequently and without warning, and students may encounter offensive material while collecting data from online sources.

Communication with Peers:

As we will be discussing language use on the internet, I encourage students to use and discuss examples of real-world "internet language", which may include swearing. However, vulgar language, hate speech, harassment and derogatory language directed toward peers or myself will NOT be tolerated. I will make every reasonable attempt to create an atmosphere in which each student feels comfortable voicing their argument without fear of being personally attacked, mocked, demeaned, or devalued.

Please alert me immediately if you feel threatened, dismissed, or silenced at any point during our semester together and/or if your engagement in discussion has been in some way hindered by the learning environment.

Assignments

In class assignments are designed to be done either individually or as a group during class time. They will directly relate to the content of the day's lecture, and will give students the opportunity to delve further into the day's topic, collect data from online sources and discuss with your peers. There will be in class assignments most days, and they cannot be made up in case of an unexcused absence.

Reading quizzes are posted on ELMS and due at 11:59 the day before the class listed in the course schedule. The two lowest reading quiz grades will be dropped.

Participation and engagement is an essential part of the classroom experience. Class participation will be evaluated through collaboration on in-class assignments and engagement in class discussion. Participation in class discussion means contributing to discussion of questions related to course content and interacting with your peers. I will not call on people to answer questions unless necessary to facilitate discussion, so it is important to provide contributions at your own discretion.

Problem sets are take-home assignments in lieu of a midterm exam. Problem sets are designed to test your knowledge of technical concepts discussed in class.

The **final presentation** is a 5-10 minute presentation on a topic related to internet language and culture, where students can incorporate concepts they have learned through the course. More details on the final presentation will be given in class.

The **final** exam will be held in person on August 1st from 9am-12pm This is a closed-note exam.

Grading Structure

Assignment	Percentage %
In class assignments	30%
Participation & Engagement	10%
Reading Quizzes (14)	14%
Problem Sets (2)	10%
Final Presentation (1)	18%
Final Exam (1)	18%
Total	100%

Academic Integrity

The University's **Code of Academic Integrity** is designed to ensure that the principles of academic honesty and integrity are upheld. Please ensure that you fully understand this code and its implications because all acts of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of this code. All students are expected to adhere to this Code. It is your responsibility to read it and know what it says.

It is important to note that course assistance websites, such as CourseHero, are not permitted sources, unless the instructor explicitly gives permission for you to use one of these sites. Material taken or copied from these sites can be deemed unauthorized material and a violation of academic integrity. These sites offer information that might not be accurate and that shortcut the learning process, particularly the critical thinking steps necessary for college-level assignments.

Additionally, unless otherwise specified, all assignments should be completed individually, including the essays and midterm. I want to hear about your opinion and experiences. If you have questions about or do ot understand an assignment please contact me.

Finally, on each exam or assignment you must write out and sign the following pledge:

"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."

Please visit the **Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies** and follow up with me if you have questions.

Grades

All assessment scores will be posted on the course ELMS page. Grades in this course are not given, but earned and are based on your performance in all of the categories listed. No part of this class is graded on a curve. Grades are given based on demonstrated mastery of course material. All assignments are individual assignments unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	97.00%	+	87.00%	+	77.00%	+	67.00%	+	
A	93.00%	B	83.00%	C	73.00%	D	63.00%	F	<60.0%
-	90.00%	-	80.00%	-	70.00%	-	60.00%	-	

Late Work

All coursework is due at 11:59pm the day before class. Note that this means that reading quizzes and homework assignments are due before class. Completing the reading and all homework assignments is essential to being prepared for lectures and discussions. Please plan accordingly so that you can submit your work on time.

The purpose of most assignments is to prepare you for the in-class discussion that follows, so submitting work on time is essential to being able to participate fully in class. Late work will be accepted for 75% credit if it is submitted *before class*

Students may use one "late voucher" during the semester to submit late work with no penalty. Email Professor Lord with the subject line "Late Voucher" *before* class. When using your late voucher, work can be submitted within 48 hours after the due date for full credit. After you have used your late voucher, documentation must be provided for any additional late work in order to receive full credit.

I will do my best to grade and return all work submitted by the due date within one week in order to provide students with actionable feedback on their work. Late work will be graded on a rolling basis when I am available to do so, and as such, late work may take more than a week for me to grade it.

Provisional Course Outline

Note that assignments are due *before* class on the date listed.
Schedule is subject to change.

Day	Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments due
M	7/14	Introduction What is Language	Language Files 1.0-1.4*	
T	7/15	Variation and creativity in online communication	McCulloch ch. 1&2*	Syllabus Scavenger Hunt Reading quiz
W	7/16	Building blocks - sounds & words	Brown et al ch. 2.1-2.3*	Reading quiz
Th	7/17	Word formation and semantic change	Lieberman 2015 (video)*	Reading quiz Problem set #1
F	7/18	How to build a conversation	McCulloch chp. 6; Johnson 2020*	Reading quiz

M	7/21	Texting: it's not just writing anymore	McCulloch ch.4, Crair 2013	Reading quiz
T	7/22	How do you meme?	Davison 2012*; McCulloch ch 7	Reading quiz
W	7/23	Because internet: reanalysis of grammatical structures	Pullum 2014	Reading quiz
Th	7/24	Emojis and communicating through pictures	McCulloch chp. 5	Reading quiz
F	7/25	Language & identity	Luu, 2015*; Vox, 2016 (video)*	Reading quiz
M	7/28	Internet in-groups: creating communities online	McCulloch Ch 3; Charlton, 2018*	Reading quiz Problem set #2
T	7/29	Kids these days: social and cultural reactions to language change	Gawne & McCulloch 2017*; Garrett 2007*	Reading quiz
W	7/30	What to do with all this data?: Collecting data online		Reading quiz
Th	7/31	Presentations Final Exam Review		
F	8/1	Final exam		

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

*Readings marked with an asterisk are posted on ELMS.

Resources & Accommodations

Accessibility and Disability Services
The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The **Accessibility & Disability Service (ADS)** provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to provide equal access to services, programs and activities. ADS cannot assist retroactively, so it is generally best to request accommodations several weeks before the semester begins or as soon as a disability becomes known. Any student who needs accommodations should contact me as soon as possible so that I have sufficient time to make arrangements.

For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact Accessibility and Disability Service at 301-314-7682, or email them at **adsfrontdesk@umd.edu**. Information about **sharing your accommodations with instructors**, **note taking assistance** and more is available from the **Counseling Center**.

Student Resources and Services
Taking personal responsibility for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit **UMD's Student Academic Support Services website** to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you.

This course fulfills a Humanities general education requirement, and takes a humanitarian approach to the study of language and creativity in online spaces. As such, coursework emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and persuasive writing. Clarity in your writing will count toward your assignment and exam grades. You are expected to take personal responsibility for your own learning. This includes acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. Everyone can use some help sharpen their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting **UMD's Writing Center** and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center.

You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need (**UMD's Student Resources and Services website** may help). If you feel it would be helpful to have someone to talk to, visit **UMD's Counseling Center** or **one of the many other mental health resources on campus**.

Everything is free because you have already paid for it, and everyone needs help, all you have to do is ask!

Basic Needs Security
If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live, please visit **UMD's Division of Student Affairs website** for information about resources the campus offers you and let me know if I can help in any way.

Course Evaluation
Please submit a course evaluation through CourseEvalUM in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to CourseEvalUM is confidential. Campus will notify

you when CourseEvalUM is open for you to complete your evaluations for fall semester courses. Please go directly to the **Course Eval UM website** to complete your evaluations. By completing all of your evaluations each semester, you will have the privilege of accessing through Testudo, the evaluation reports for the thousands of courses for which 70% or more students submitted their evaluations.

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