

Department of Anthropology

ANTH 2250A-001

Verbal Art, Performance and Speech Play

COURSE OUTLINE

Fall 2023

Version date: 29 August, 2023

Instructor and course information:

Instructor: Dr. K. Pennesi

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Credit value: 0.5 credit

Antirequisites: The former ANTH 2250F/G

Prerequisites: None

Course Description:

Creativity and expression are fundamental to human language. This course examines the artful and playful use of spoken language in relation to social organization and cultural practices. Analytical attention is given to how something is expressed as well as the content of what is expressed. Speech play includes joking, teasing, making puns, creating mnemonic devices, riddles, play languages, and verbal duelling. Verbal art describes creative uses of language that conform to more formal patterns and structures such as spoken word poetry, storytelling, stand-up comedy, and songs. Students will explore how specific speech play and verbal art practices develop differently among cultures. Readings and discussions will focus on the motivation for and interpretation of linguistic and performative choices in particular contexts.

Students will learn to analyze performances of verbal art and speech play for their form as well as their social and cultural meanings through observation, analysis, and active participation as audience members and performers of their own creative works.

Note that we will be analyzing jokes, poems, songs and other linguistic creations from various (sub)cultures which may contain words or ideas that some students find offensive. In no way should they be taken to represent the instructor's personal views or the views of students presenting such material as examples. Students are expected to think critically about the contexts of production and interpretation of these examples as they learn about their linguistic and performative features.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and analyze grammatical structures, discourse features, and performative aspects of speech play and verbal art
- Describe how verbal art and speech play contribute to language socialization and the formation of social relationships
- Make arguments about connections between language and culture using analyses of verbal art and speech play
- Compare how linguistic skills are evaluated differently across cultures and contexts

- Read, summarize and explain primary literature in linguistics and anthropology
- Present results of analysis in oral and written forms according to academic conventions
- Appreciate the skills and fun involved in creative uses of language

Course Materials:

1. Sherzer, Joel. 2002. *Speech Play and Verbal Art*. University of Texas Press.

Hard copies of this text will be available in the Bookstore, however, an electronic version of this text is also available using the Course Readings tool in OWL.

2. Other required readings will be available using the Course Readings tool in OWL.
3. Audio-visual materials will be posted on OWL.

Evaluation:

Quizzes on readings	10%
Practice Activities	10%
Analysis 1 - oral	15%
Midterm Test	15%
Analysis 2 - written	15%
Performance and report	35%

The evaluation methods described in this course outline are essential requirements to meet the learning objectives of the course.

Quizzes on Readings – 10%

To guide you to the main ideas of the readings, you will complete quizzes on the assigned readings in OWL. To aid your comprehension and retention of the material and in preparation for the test and assignments, I suggest that you keep notes on important ideas from the readings, including the questions and correct answers from the quizzes. Have your notes handy in every class for reference during discussions and activities.

Beginning in Week 2, there are ten weeks when quizzes are. Audio-visual materials assigned as preparation may also be included in the quiz questions. Quizzes will be activated on the OWL site one week before they are due.

All ten quizzes will count toward 10% of the course grade (1% each). If you know you are going to miss a class, you may submit the quiz early. Late submissions will not be accepted since each weekly submission is not worth enough points to deduct a late penalty and the answers to the questions will be discussed in class. If you miss the quiz deadline, you will simply receive a zero that week. If you miss a quiz in addition to another assignment in a given week (i.e. >10% of the course mark), and have a legitimate reason, you should go to Academic Counselling to request accommodations for both assignments. See below for more details about Accommodation Policies.

Practice Activities – 10%

Throughout the course there will be learning activities designed for students to practice elements of speech play or creating verbal art. Points will be given for completion of the tasks but they will not be evaluated. These practice activities will take place during class time or asynchronously through OWL to enhance student engagement with the material.

Participation

In class we will discuss the reading material and work through examples of analysis. When completing assignments, you are expected to incorporate any new material

presented in class, in addition to the readings. You are expected to come prepared to every class and to participate meaningfully in all learning activities, whether led by the instructor or other classmates. There will be many occasions for interacting with your classmates, as you will be seated in small groups. Participation does not require you to have mastered the material, but rather you should engage with it. In addition to offering interpretations, insights and opinions, your participation includes disagreeing with course material and asking questions when you do not understand it.

Consistent class participation will help you process the material most effectively, which will in turn enable you to get the most (learning, marks) out of the assignments. Participation is not graded but if you show up regularly and do the work, you significantly increase your chances of success.

Analysis – 15 x 2 = 30%

1. Oral Presentation on Recorded Performance

In Week 5 (Oct. 5th), each student will present an analysis of a recorded performance of verbal art or speech play that is publicly available. You will present to a small group of 4 or 5 classmates.

During your presentation, you will show the data you analyzed (audio or video clip) and identify and discuss relevant features of verbal art and speech play. The group will then have some time to discuss the question and your analysis. The presentation and discussion will be 10 minutes altogether.

In the analysis, you will:

- Explain why you selected the piece, why you like it, where you found it.
- Provide contextual background to aid the audience's appreciation or interpretation.
- Describe how the piece illustrates one or two concepts or features of verbal art or speech play that we have learned in class. Be specific in indicating line numbers or time markers or quoted lines so listeners can identify the section.
- Discuss how the piece supports or challenges one of the theories we have learned in class.

You must submit to Voice Thread on OWL a link or electronic file of the performance you analyze, as well as a recording of your presentation. You may make the recording at home while you are practicing your presentation or you may record your presentation live in the classroom. The recordings must be uploaded to OWL by 11:55 on Oct. 5th.

Detailed instructions are provided on OWL>Course Materials>Assignment Instructions.

2. Written Report on Live Performance

In the second half of the course, you will observe a live verbal art performance. It does not need to be a professional or official event but it must be an identifiable genre of verbal art or speech play, which is distinct from everyday conversation, and a situation in which verbal skills are on display for an audience. Some examples include: language games, a formal debate (not just people arguing), storytelling, poetry performance, stand-up comedy routine, prepared speech, original song or rap, and more. You will observe the event in person and analyze the performance using concepts and theories from the course, paying particular attention to the relationship between speaker and audience. You must choose a different type of verbal art from your first assignment (i.e. they cannot both be poems, songs, etc.).

You are advised to attend the performance after completing the Week 8 readings and to write the paper as soon as possible after you have observed the performance, when your memory is still fresh. The due date to submit both paper copy (in class) and electronic copies (on OWL) is November 23rd.

Detailed instructions are provided on OWL>Course Materials>Assignment Instructions.

Midterm Test - 15%

On October 19th students will write a midterm test. The test will be multiple choice format and will involve applying knowledge of concepts, terms and theories from the course to examples of verbal art provided. Students may bring a one-page study aid (printed) with terms and definitions, with approval by the professor. Students needing accommodations should contact [Accessible Education](#).

Performance and Report – 35%

Performance – 25%

Instead of a final exam, students will demonstrate their learning in this course by performing an original piece of verbal art. To satisfy the requirements of an exam, you must incorporate references to course material (i.e. concepts, theories, specific readings or examples) in the content of your verbal art. You must include course material from Week 8 and after. Performance here is loosely defined, in keeping with the definition that we will develop in class. Some examples include: stand-up comedy, a skit or short play, spoken word poetry, song (lyrics must be original but you can use pre-recorded music), story, verbal duel (with another participant, not necessarily a classmate), and more. For this assignment, you must consult with the professor during office hours or after class by November 23rd. All students will perform their piece in class on December 5th or 7th.

Report – 10%

You will write report describing how you applied the concepts we have learned in your performance. The purpose of this assignment is to clearly explain the connections between your performance and what you have learned from the course. This is a formal piece of academic writing (500–600 words) and must include references to relevant course materials. Upload the report to OWL > Assignments by December 7th.

See detailed instructions in Course Materials > Assignment Instructions.

Guidelines for Written Assignments:

All written assignments should follow the guidelines below.

- Formatting: double-spaced, 12 point font, 2.5 cm margins, title and full name at the top of first page, number all pages except the title page.
- The assignment title must reflect the content (e.g. not "Homework 1"). Writing a descriptive title actually helps you clarify what your assignment is about.
- Cite references according to the Author-Date version of the Chicago Manual of Style. There is a Style Guide with examples of how to do this posted on OWL in Course Materials under Writing Resources.
- For analyses and reports, write in full sentences using an academic style of language. (This does not apply to performances.)
- Paper copies of all assignments should be submitted in class on the day they are due. If you are unable to do this, you must submit your assignment to the Anthropology drop box outside the main office in SSC 3326 by 4 p.m. Friday in the week the assignment is due. This grace period eliminates the need to ask for extensions and ensures that I have enough time to mark the assignments and return them to you in a timely manner. Assignments sent by e-mail will not be accepted. Homework assignments submitted after Friday day will not be accepted without recommendations for accommodation from Academic Counselling.
- Electronic versions of assignments must also be uploaded to OWL by noon on the due date so they can be checked by Turnitin.com for plagiarism. Do not send your assignments by e-mail. Only the paper copy will be marked. If you do not submit a paper copy, you will not receive a grade.

- Evaluation criteria will be provided by the professor for each assignment; be sure to consult these when completing your work.

Academic Statements and Policies:

Academic Integrity - Statement on Plagiarism

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

Academic Rights and Responsibilities

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current [Academic Policies in the Academic Calendar](#) which include, but is not limited to, academic consideration for medical illness, accommodation for religious holidays, academic appeals, academic accommodation for students with disabilities, as well as scholastic discipline.

Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Occasionally illness or other personal issues make it impossible to meet deadlines, even with the grace period. If you have missed, or will miss, any course work, whether it be for medical related or non-medical related, please read the details and instructions on "[What is Academic Consideration?](#)"

Accommodation Policies

No accommodations will be granted retroactively more than 10 days after an assignment's due date or a missed quiz. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking accommodations based on medical or compassionate grounds.

All missed work must be made up by the end of the exam period in the applicable term.

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. Please see [Accessible Education](#) for more information.

Course Specific Conditions Required to Pass this Course

To pass this course students must submit both analysis assignments, and pass the midterm test and performance assignment with a mark of at least 50%.

Use of OWL

Western's online course management program, will be used for providing the final course outline and weekly schedule (using the Syllabus page), completing weekly quizzes (using the Test and Quizzes tool), providing, submitting and returning assignments (using the Assignments page and Voice Thread), and communications with the class (using the Announcements and Messages tools). All grades will be posted in the OWL Gradebook.

If you encounter any problems using OWL, such as downloading and uploading documents or taking a quiz, try solving it by reading the [OWL Help](#) pages. If that doesn't work, contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#) by phone, in person or online. The professor cannot offer any computer-related assistance. Efforts to seek help from WTS must be documented if you are planning to request accommodations due to problems with OWL.

Statement on Backing up Your Work

Make sure to regularly back up all your work on an external site (such as the Western One Drive, an external hard drive, send it to yourself in e-mail, cloud, etc.) in case your computer crashes or is stolen. This should be standard practice for anything you do on your computer. No extensions for any assignments will be granted because of computer malfunctions or lost files.

Policy on Laptops and Cellphones in Class

Laptops and tablets are permitted for note-taking in class but if it is observed that students are using their devices for anything other than course activities, they will be asked to put them away and will not be permitted to use it for the remainder of the class. Anyone causing distractions may be asked to leave. All cellphones should be turned off at the beginning of class.

Required Readings (all available through "Course Readings"):

Bauman, Richard. 2011. "Commentary: Foundations in Performance." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15(5): 707-720.

Bunin Benor, Sarah. 2016. "Jews of Color: Performing Black Jewishness through the Creative Use of Two Ethnolinguistic Repertoires." In H. Samy Alim, John Rickford and Arnetta Ball (eds.), *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes our Ideas about Race*. New York: Oxford University Press. (p. 171-184).

DeBose, Charles. 2015. African American Church Language. In Jennifer Bloomquist (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 36 (p. 677-690).

Gilmore, Perry. 2015. Kisi (Our Language): The Story of Colin and Sadiki. Ch. 3 (p.35-57)

Haviland, John. 2011. "Who Asked You, Condom Head?" *Anthropological Quarterly*. 84(1): 235-264.

Joersz, Alison. 2015. Slogonization and the Political Pragmatics of Interdiscursivity: The Social Life of a Haitian Political Critique. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. 25(3):303-322.

McKinney and Chun. 2017. "Celebrations of a Satirical Song: Ideologies of Anti-Racism in the Media." In Nancy Bell (ed.), *Multiple Perspectives on Language Play*. De Gruyter. Electronic document available from ProQuest Ebook Central.

Miller, Peggy. 1986. "Teasing as Language Socialization and Verbal Play in a White Working-Class Community." In Bambi Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs (eds.) *Language Socialization across Cultures*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (p. 199-212).

Miller Griffith, Lauren and Jonathan Marion. 2017. "Performance." In Nina Brown, Laura Tubelle de González and Thomas McIlwraith (eds.), *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*. American Anthropological Association. Electronic document available at: <http://perspectives.americananthro.org/>. 24 pp.

Minks, Amanda. 2013. *Voices of Play: Miskitu Children's Speech and Song on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press. Ch. 3 (p. 46-77). Audio clips of transcripts which appear in the book are available to hear at: <https://voicesofplay.net/media/>

Norricks, Neal. 2017. Language Play in Conversation. In Nancy Bell (ed.), *Multiple Perspectives on Language Play*. De Gruyter. Electronic document available from ProQuest Ebook Central.

Pennesi, Karen. 2021. What Does a Pandemic Sound Like?: The Emergence of COVID Verbal Art. *Anthropologica* 63(1):1-15. Thematic Section: Giving Shape to COVID-19.

Rambsy, Howard and Briana Whiteside. 2015. "African American Language and Black Poetry. In Jennifer Bloomquist (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 38 (p. 706-722).

Scarpetta, Fabiola and Anna Spagnolli. 2009. "The Interactional Context of Humor in Stand-up Comedy." *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 42(3): 210-230.

Weinstein, Susan. 2018. *The Room Is on Fire: The History, Pedagogy and Practice of Youth Spoken Word Poetry*. Albany: State University of New York Press. Ch. 4 (p. 87-118).

Williams, Quentin. 2017. *Remix Multilingualism: Hip Hop, Ethnography and Performing Marginalized Voices*. New York: Bloomsbury. Ch. 6 (p. 123-147).

Weekly Schedule of Topics and Readings:

Week	Date	Topics	Readings	Assignments
1	7 Sept.	Introduction to course	Read syllabus	
2	12 Sept. 14 Sept.	Defining verbal art and speech play	Sherzer 2002: Ch. 1,2	Quiz
3	19 Sept. 21 Sept.	Speech play in context	Sherzer 2002: Ch. 3 Norrick 2017	Quiz
4	26 Sept. 28 Sept.	Speech play to verbal art: structure	Sherzer 2002: Ch. 4; Various poems (listen to first 4 poems on OWL and choose some from the other links)	Quiz
5	3 Oct. 5 Oct.	Sociocultural contexts of speech play	Sherzer 2002: Ch. 5 Gilmore 2015	Quiz Analysis 1 and presentation due
6	10 Oct. 12 Oct.	Black Poets, Spoken Word Poetry and Rap Spoken word poetry workshop	Rambsy & Whiteside 2015; Weinstein 2018; Poems on OWL	Quiz
7	17 Oct. 19 Oct.	Foundations in studies of performance	Bauman 2011; Miller Griffith & Marion 2017	Quiz Midterm Test
8	24 Oct. 26 Oct.	Interacting with the audience Comedy workshop	Scarpetta & Spagnolli 2009; Haviland 2011; De Bose 2015	Quiz
	31 Oct. 2 Nov.	NO CLASS	READING WEEK	

Week	Date	Topics	Readings	Assignments
9	7 Nov. 9 Nov.	Intertextuality in verbal art and speech play	Bunin Benor 2016; Williams 2017; Joersz 2015	Quiz
10	14 Nov. 16 Nov.	Songwriting Workshop NO CLASS (prof away)		Bring an image significant to you
11	21 Nov. 23 Nov.	Verbal art and performance in times of social upheaval	Pennesi 2021; McKinney & Chun 2017 (videos on OWL)	Quiz Analysis 2 due
12	28 Nov. 30 Nov.	Speech play and verbal art for/by children	Minks 2013; Miller 1986 Preparation for Performance	Quiz
13	5 Dec. 7 Dec.	Student Performances both days this week		Performance 2 Reports due