

O. P. Jindal Global University
Fall Semester 2026

[OEFL-CFL-ELP]: **Language, Society, and Politics**

Cross-Elective Course

Instructor: Prof. Sérgio Meira (sergiomdsc_oliveira@jgu.edu.in)

Room/Time: TBD

This undergraduate elective course carries weight of 4 credits.

“A language is a dialect with an army and a navy,” said once Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich. As one of the clearest markers of ethnic and cultural identity, language often plays a socio-political role: countries have “official languages”, other languages have “official status” in various spaces and for various purposes, and there are “language policies” aimed at protecting (or attacking) specific languages, to the point that the very existence of some languages (Serbocroatian, Ukrainian) can be a hot topic of political debate with real-world consequences like conflicts and war.

In this course, we will approach these questions, considering (a) the language-dialect distinction (a continuum), from both a scientific (linguistic) and a social (political) perspective; (b) language as part of (cultural) identity (group cohesion, group perception) and/or citizenship (political rights, duties, and power); (c) language status, policy, and planning in various situations and countries, from minority languages to official languages and on to international or global languages like English, via several case studies; and (d) changes in the aforementioned topics over time, i.e. the evolution of ideas on the relation between language, culture, ethnicity and politics.

The final goals of this course will be (a) to empower students to understand and discuss the various intricacies of the situations in which languages and their communities find themselves, and (b) to apply this understanding to specific cases and to relate the resulting insights to their own field of interest (international relations, law, business, politics, public policy, etc.).

COURSE OUTLINE (CALENDAR)

SESSIONS	TOPICS	READINGS / ASSIGNMENTS
1 st class	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction to the course• Initial discussion of basic concepts:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Language, dialects, varieties- Identity, performativity- Social groups, prestige, stigma- Politics, policy, conflict- Purism, appropriation, revitalisation	(Assignment 0)
2 nd -3 rd class	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initial perspective:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- how do people talk?	- McGregor, Ch. 7: <i>Sociolinguistics: language in its social context.</i>

	<p>(descriptive approach)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how 'should' people talk? (prescriptive approach) - Protecting language: linguistic purism and "linguistic catastrophism" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Degeneration of English: https://thesimpsonian.com/17292/uncategorized/the-degeneration-of-the-english-language/ - Prescriptive style: http://www.berfrois.com/2012/07/deborah-cameron-grammar-alchemy/ http://www.berfrois.com/2012/12/deborah-cameron-a-word-of-the-queens/ https://www.chronicle.com/article/50-years-of-stupid-grammar-advice/?emailConfirmed=true&supportSignUp=true&supportForgotPassword=true&email=asehpe%40gmail.com&success=true&code=success&bc_nonce=km71blr78bkw5uwndn7kbbk&cid=gen_sign_in
4 th -5 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The origin and spread of language differences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language, dialect, register - Language change - "Degradation" - Language contact and language conflict - Language loss and death - Language endangerment, survival and revitalisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Degeneration of English (again): https://thesimpsonian.com/17292/uncategorized/the-degeneration-of-the-english-language/ - McGregor Ch. 15: <i>Language change</i> - Assignment 1 (due next week)
6 th -7 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language varieties in society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social groups, prestige, conflict: theory and implications - Language and gender, language and race - Language and identity, language and individuality - Linguistic and cultural appropriation 	<p>Spolsky, 2004, Ch. 1-3 Hill, J. H. (1993). Hasta la vista, baby: Anglo Spanish in the American Southwest. <i>Critique of Anthropology</i> 13:145-176.</p>
8 th -9 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation of language(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal prescriptivism - Language policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spolsky 2004, Ch. 4: The nature of language policy and its domain - Assignment 2 (due next week)
10 th -11 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The European case: language and language regulation in Europe. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The importance of language politics in Europe - General European language policy 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Country-specific language policy 	
12 th -13 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The European case: Language and language conflict in Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language and the history of ethnic conflict in Europe - Specific cases: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Latin, French, English 2. The Habsburg Empire 3. The Russian Empire until now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flier & Andrea 2017 - Greenberg 2004 - Assignment 3 (due next week)
14 th -15 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The American case: language and language regulation in the Americas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European languages - Indigenous and creole languages: the status of native peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bratt-Paulston, C. 2001.
16 th -17 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The American case: Language and language conflict in the Americas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colonialism and its demise - 'Metropolitan' languages - Independence, relevance, renewed identity and language: the post-colonial landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment 4 (due next week)
18 th -19 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian case: Language and language policy in India <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Indian policy towards languages - The role of English - The role of official languages - The role of non-official ('tribal') languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Baldrige 1995 - Delican, M. 2022
20 th -21 st class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian case: Language and language conflict in India <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is language loyalty a factor in Indian internal conflicts? - Hindi vs. English - Hindi vs. Urdu - Hindi vs. All Others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gupta 1970 - Assignment 5 (due next week)

22 nd -23 rd class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rest of the World: Language and language policy in Africa, Asia, and Oceania 	- Bastardas-Boada 2012
24 th -25 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rest of the World: Language and language conflict in Africa, Asia, and Oceania 	
26 th -27 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comparative appraisal: what are the differences and similarities between the various regions of the world? 	- Mufwene 2002
28 th -29 th class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why language policy in today's world? - What is "language justice" (cf. "social justice") - Is a perfect linguistic world possible? Is there a policy that leads to such a perfect world? 	- Final exam, to be given out on last day of classes) and returned (uploaded) by the end of the Examination Period.

INDICATIVE COURSE MATERIALS:

Mesthrie, R, Swann, J., Deumert, A., & Leap, W. L. 2009 (2nd ed.). *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh University Press.

McGregor, W. 2015 (2009). *Linguistics: An Introduction*. Bloomsbury / Continuum.

Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. 2021. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Wiley Blackwell.

Spolsky, B. 2004. *Language Policy*. Key Topics in Sociolinguistics series. Cambridge University Press.

Spolsky, B. 2012. *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Romaine, S. 1995. *Bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ferguson, G. 2006. *Language Planning and Education*. Edinburgh University Press.

Other texts:

Baldrige, J. 1996. *Reconciling Linguistic Diversity: The History and the Future of Language Policy in India*. www.ling.upenn.edu/~jason2/papers/natlang.htm

- Bastardas-Boada, A. 2012. *Language and identity policies in the 'global' age*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Autònoms.
- Bratt-Paulston, C. 2001. *Linguistic Minorities in Multilingual Settings: Implications for Language Policies*. John Benjamins.
- Delican, M. 2022 (ms.). *The Language Policy of India*.
<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/101067#:~:text=In%20the%20Eighth%20Schedule%20of%20the%20Indian%20Constitution%2C%20Union%20and%20Urdu%20are%20states%20languages.>
- Flier, M., Andrea, G. (eds). 2017. *The Battle for Ukrainian: A Comparative Perspective*. Harvard University Press.
- Fromkin, V., et al. 2018. (5th ed.) *An Introduction to Language*. Cengage Learning.
- Gandhi, K. L. 1984. *The Problem of an Official Language in India*. New Delhi: Arya Book Depot, Karol Bugh.
- Greenberg, R. D. 2004. *Language and identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and its Disintegration*. Oxford University Press.
- Grenoble, L. A., and Whaley, L. J. (eds). 1998. *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grenoble, L. A., and Whaley, L. J. (eds). 2006. *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*.
- Gupta, D. J. 1970. *Language Conflict and National Development. Group Politics and National Language Policy in India*. University of California Press.
- Hale, K., & Hinton, L. (eds) (2001). *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. Boston: Brill.
- Hinton, L. 2002. *How to Keep Your Language Alive*. Berkeley: Heyday Books.
- King, C. R. *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in 19th-Century North India*. Oxford University Press.
- Maksimova, Ks. 2019. The Characteristics of Language Policy in Ukraine after the USSR Disintegration. *Language Conflicts in Contemporary Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine*. Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, vol. 296. Styut
- McClosky, J. 2001. *Voices Silenced: Has Irish a Future? Guthanna in Éag: An Mairfidh an Ghaeilge Beo*. Dublin: Cois Life.
- McGregor, W. 2015 (2009). *Linguistics: An Introduction*. Bloomsbury / Continuum.
- Mufwene, S. 2002. Colonisation, globalisation, and the future of languages in the 21st Century. *International Journal of Multicultural Societies* 4 (2):162–193.
- Romaine, S. 2001. Multilingualism. In: M. Aronoff and J. Rees-Miller (eds), *The Handbook of Linguistics*, Blackwell, pp. 512–532.

Ronelle, A. 2013. Language and Identity: The Fate of Serbo-Croatian. In *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 1, pp. 341–417. Boston: Brill.

Reznik, V. 2018. Language Policy in Independent Ukraine: A Battle for National and Linguistic Empowerment. *Language Planning in the Post-Communist Era: The Struggles for Language Control in the New Order in Eastern Europe, Eurasia and China*. Palgrave Mcmillan, pp. 169–192.

Websites:

General linguistics website: www.dilbilimi.net/homepage.htm

Language policy website: www.languagepolicy.net

Exploring the languages of the world: www.ethnologue.com

European Council language policy website: www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/home

Some strange language policies and laws:
www.thetranslationcompany.com/news/blog/language-news/worlds-weirdest-language-7brands/

A journal on languages in India: www.languageinindia.com/index.htm

The Central Institute of Indian Languages: www.ciil.org

ASSESSMENT PATTERN:

5 short assignments with at most 300-500 word answers (20% of course grade)

A presentation project on a selected topic (30% of course grade)

Individual participation in class and on the web (20% of course grade)

End-semester examination (30% of course grade)