

**English 433: Modern Grammar**  
Tuesday/Thursday, 2:00-3:50 p.m., CL 053

<http://www.ric.edu/rpotter/language.html>

**Dr. Russell A. Potter**  
*rpotter@ric.edu*

This course, despite its official name, is not strictly speaking a course on grammar, though grammar will not be neglected. What it really is is an introduction to issues in the study and teaching of the English language today, including (but not limited to) such matters as the acquisition of language, grammar, usage, the idea of the "standard," perceptions of "accent," the history of the language, and its inner mechanics (syntax, morphology, phonology). Throughout the course, by demonstrating that there is in fact a *history* to many aspects of our language -- particularly to the usage perceived as "correct" at different times and places -- we will be able to demystify some of its apparently arcane and troublesome features. We will also pay particular attention to current issues in the teaching of English, such as the recent furor over "Ebonics" in the Oakland California Unified School District, the way gender affects the usage and social parsing of English, the questions raised by various "English only" movements, and issues of linguistic assimilation and 'English as a Second Language' instruction. Some attention will also be paid to the issues of language development, the psychodynamics of "correcting" student writing, and the ways in which new technologies of communication (satellite television, the Internet, the telephone) have affected patterns and perceptions about speech.

In addition to the regular class discussions and readings, there will be three linguistic exercises which will require careful observation of language and language-related behaviors, and which will be written up as short (2-4 page) reports.

**TEXTS:** (available at Off Campus Bookstore on Smith Street)

Crystal, et. al., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)  
Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent*

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

Week I (Aug. 31, Sept. 2): Tuesday: Introduction to the course; phonology workshop (consonants).  
Thursday: Phonology workshop (vowels)

Week II (Sept 7, 9): The Early History of English. Readings: *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (hereafter *CEEL*), Part I: The History of English; The origins of English; Old English. [Assignment #1: "lexicography" handed out Thursday]

Week III (Sept 14, 16): The Later History of English: Readings: *CEEL*, Part I: Middle English; Early modern English; Modern English; World English.

Week IV (Sept. 21, 23): Lexicon. Readings: *CEEL*, Part II: The English Lexicon; The nature of the lexicon; The sources of the lexicon; Etymology; The structure of the lexicon; Lexical dimensions. [Assignment #1 due Thursday]

Week V (Sept. 28, 30): Grammar: Readings: *CEEL*, Part III: English Grammar; Grammatical mythology; examples of early English grammars from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (handout).

Week VI (Oct 5, 7): Morphology and Syntax. Readings: *CEEL*, Part III: Morphology; Word classes; Syntax.

Week VII (Oct. 14): Phonology. Readings: *CEEL*, Part IV: Spoken and Written English; The sound system; the writing system. **[NOTE: No class Tuesday due to Monday/Tuesday schedule switch]**

Week VIII (Oct. 19, 21): Variants & Variance, the myth of the "standard." Readings: *CEEL*, Part V: Using English; Varieties of discourse; Regional variation; Social variation. [Assignment #2: "sampling language" handed out Thursday].

Week IX (Oct. 26, 28): Debunking the Normative. Readings: Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*, "The Myth of Non-Accent," "The standard language myth," "Language ideology and the language subordination model."

Week X (Nov. 2, 4): Language and Race in America. Reading: John Baugh, "At Last: Plantation English in America: Nonstandard Varieties and the Quest for Educational Equity" and "Linguistic Profiling" (online) [Assignment #2 due Tuesday].

Week XI (Nov. 9, 10): The "Southern trough" and linguistic prejudice. Readings: Lippi-Green, "Hillbillies, Rednecks, and Southern Belles: The Language Rebels." **[NOTE: Thursday's class meets on Wednesday this week]**

Week XII (Nov. 23) Language, second-language acquisition, and linguistic nationalism. . Reading: Lippi-Green, "The stranger within the gates." [assignment #3 due].

Week XIII (Nov. 30, Dec. 2) Tuesday: Language, the Internet, and the Media. Reading: *CEEL* Chapter 23, "Electronic Variation." Thursday: *CEEL* chapter 25, "New ways of studying English."

Week XIV (Dec. 7, 9): Tuesday: The future of English (handouts). Thursday: review for exam.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

1. DUE SEPTEMBER 23<sup>rd</sup>: Practice etymology. Research on a word handed out the previous week. For your word, record 1) Date and context in which first used -- for the primary and at least one "secondary" meaning; 2) Language or languages from which the word has evolved, if other than English; and 3) Any significantly different meaning(s) the word has had in the past, with rough dates, including obsolete, slang, or non-standard usages.

2. DUE NOVEMBER 4<sup>th</sup>: Linguistic Analysis I: Sampling. This essay will be based on a brief sample of spoken language from the modern era. You will need to provide an overall analysis of the semantic, lexical, and phonological features of the sample, with a particular emphasis on sound and phonological difference. The written report should analyze at least two phonological features of the speech, as well as lexical and syntactical features, and conclude with a discussion of the social situation of the speaker and the presumed audience.