LING 792/492: Problematizing the Native Speaker in Linguistics Research

Tu-Thu 2:30 - 4:00 on Zoom

I’ll be broadcasting from the traditional and unceded territories of the Three Fire Peoples: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Bodewadmi

Instructor: Savithry Namboodiripad (she | her | hers)
savithry@umich.edu
Office hours: by appointment on BlueJeans

Your health is important and should be your top priority. Let me know how I can help.

Course description

Much of linguistic research concerns itself with the linguistic knowledge and behavior of “native speakers.” This course encourages us to interrogate that category, and to ask what we may lose and gain by abandoning the label all together. We will investigate this topic from the perspective of a variety of disciplines which engage with the idea of “native speakers,” including linguistic anthropology, educational linguistics, post-colonial studies, “heritage” language studies, L2 acquisition, and beyond. We will discuss consequences of shifting our conceptions of “native” for various theoretical approaches to linguistics, and, for those of us conducting experiments, think about how we can change the way we recruit, include, and describe our participants.

Requirements: Students will be asked to engage critically with and reflect upon articles via reading questions and class discussion. The final project will be a class project which outlines recommendations and best practices for our fellow linguists. Interested students will have the opportunity to co-write a paper on native speakers (co-written abstract due by Nov 30).

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast various characterizations of the term NATIVE SPEAKER and explain their sources
2. Track the history of the use of the term NATIVE SPEAKER
3. Read and summarize academic articles from a variety of linguistics-adjacent disciplines
4. Discuss disciplinary differences in engagement with native speakerhood
5. Interpret survey data
6. List and motivate best practices for characterizing individuals’ language use and experience
7. Have their own informed opinion of whether and how to use the term NATIVE SPEAKER

Course deliverables

- Before 1 PM each class day: Complete assigned reading(s) and article summary in shared google doc.
- Pre-, Mid-, and Post-Course surveys
- Final reflection
• Conduct a survey of language scholars’ attitudes towards and impressions of the term NATIVE SPEAKER
• Co-created blog post
• (more information to come for students involved in co-authoring paper)

Don’t skip this section! Important resources

Unforeseen circumstances

If any type of circumstances arise such that you are prevented from turning in assignments on time, or completing any other requirement of the course, please email me as soon as possible. I am more than happy to consider extensions, make-up assignments, or other accommodations. Please communicate early and often!

Caretaking responsibilities, home life, and course expectations

Attendance and participation during the synchronous portion of this course is encouraged, but if you have any conflicts at all which prevent you from doing this, I am very happy for us to think of other ways to include your contributions to our discussions. You are never required to have your camera on during Zoom sessions, and any children, other loved ones, and non-human animals who might make their way into your realm are very much welcome. Let me know if course expectations are conflicting with your caretaking responsibilities, and we can work together to determine appropriate accommodations.

Disability access statement

I am committed to working with you for any disability or other learning related needs and accommodations. Please communicate with me (over email savithry@umich.edu or in office hours) during the first week of class or as soon as concerns arise. If you haven’t already, check out the University of Michigan’s Services for Students with Disabilities (https://ssd.umich.edu/, G-664 Haven Hall). If appropriate, we can work together with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; ssd.umich.edu) typically recommends accommodation through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such. I treat the SSD accommodations as a starting point, not a be-all end-all, and I do not require an accommodation letter for you to ask for adjustments.

Statement of basic needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.

Student well-being

If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available at the University of Michigan. I take the mental health and general well-being of students and community members very seriously.

For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (734-764-8312; https://caps.umich.edu/) during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult University Health Service (UHS) at (734) 764-8320 and https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs.
For alcohol or drug concerns, see [www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources](http://www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources).

For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: [http://umich.edu/mhealth/](http://umich.edu/mhealth/).

**Schedule**

This schedule is subject to change, and I welcome any article suggestions you may have! Any changes will be announced in class and via Canvas as soon as possible.

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<thead>
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**Papers**

1. Key concepts
   - Otheguy, García, & Reid (2015): Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics
   - Rosa 2016: Standardization, Racialization, Languagelessness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies across Communicative Contexts
   - Holliday 2006: Key concepts in ELT: Native speakerism
2. Raciolinguistics

- Rosa & Flores 2017: Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective
- Ramjattan 2019: The white native speaker and inequality regimes in the private English language school
- Lowe & Pinner 2016: Finding the connections between native-speakerism and authenticity

3. Maturation and acquisition

- Hall, Levin, & Anderson 2017: Language deprivation syndrome: a possible neurodevelopmental disorder with sociocultural origins
- Costello, Fernández & Landa 2008: The non-(existent) native signer: sign language research in a small deaf population
- Quer & Steinbach 2019: Handling sign language data: The impact of Modality
- Balari & Lorenzo 2015: Should it stay or should it go? A critical reflection on the critical period for language
- Morford & Carlson 2011: Sign perception and recognition in Non-native signers of ASL
- Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2009: Age of Onset and Nativelikeness in a Second Language: Listener Perception Versus Linguistic Scrutiny

4. Switch dominance

- Benmamoun, Montrul, & Maria Polinsky 2013: Heritage languages and their speakers: Opportunities and challenges for linguistics
- Rothman & Treffers-Daller 2014: A Prolegomenon to the Construct of the Native Speaker: Heritage Speaker Bilinguals are Natives Too!
- Sorace 2004: Native language attrition and developmental instability at the syntax-discourse interface: Data, interpretations and methods
- Au et al. 2002: Overhearing a Language During Childhood
- Solís-Barroso & Stefanich 2019: Measuring Language Dominance in Early Spanish-English Bilinguals

5. Settler colonialism

- Meek 2016: Shrinking Indigenous Language in the Yukon
- Boltokova 2017: “Will the Real Semi-Speaker Please Stand Up?”: Language Vitality, Semi-Speakers, and Problems of Enumeration in the Canadian North
- Braithwaite 2020: Ideologies of linguistic research on small sign languages in the global South: A Caribbean perspective

6. High-contact languages

- DeGraff 2008: Linguists' most dangerous myth: The fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism
- Nero 1997: English is my native language...or so I believe
- Namboodiripad 2020: Non-Dravidian elements and (non)diasystematic change in Malayalam
- Brentari & Padden 2001: Native and Foreign Vocabulary in American Sign Language: a lexicon with multiple origins
7. Theoretical approaches

- Thraínsson 2012: Ideal Speakers and Other Speakers: The Case of Dative and Some Other Cases
- Höder 2012: Multilingual constructions: A diasystematic approach to common structures
- Backus 2013: A usage-based approach to borrowability