JWST 219O: Special Topics in Jewish Studies: Jewish Languages in America

Professor: Avital Feuer
Office: Susquehanna 4132
Tel.: 301-405-8216 (Office)
Meeting Location and Times: ONLINE
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 10:45 (please make appointment)
Email: afeuer@umd.edu

ELMS site: https://myelms.umd.edu/courses/1132670
Required Textbooks: Course packet
Required Technology: Internet and computer access
Prerequisites: None
Method of Communication with Students: Email or announcements on ELMS website
Emergency Protocol: If the university is closed for an extended period of time, the course will be completed online, with lectures and assignments posted and sent via the ELMS website and email.

Course description:

With a particular focus on language minority intra-group relationships - the convergences, divergences, feelings of solidarity and tensions of difference within the group - this course will examine the history, current functional use and identity implications within the American Jewish community. Jewish immigrants have made important cultural and linguistic contributions to American diversity. When they immigrated to the U.S., they brought with them languages of their birth countries and in addition, most shared the lingua franca of Yiddish and had knowledge of Hebrew from religious texts or the revived spoken form. They then acquired American English. Today, recent immigrants add languages such as Amharic, Spanish and Russian to the American Jewish tapestry. Authors, poets and artists have shared their experiences using varieties of these languages and dialects.

Two main perspectives shape this course: 1. First, we will explore Jews' linguistic communication with the majority American population and determine ways in which this interaction shaped their sense of ethnic and American identity. We will discuss research and creative works from other cultures in which minority/majority language use is exemplified and compare it to the Jewish American context. 2. Second, we will investigate intra-group cultural and linguistic identity demarcations: examples include the codeswitch of Russian-Jewish immigrants to the U.S., the dialect of Orthodox Jewish communities and unique language of Jewish summer camps. Within the Jewish community, sub-groups use mixtures of Hebrew, English, Yiddish, and other languages to create a unique sense of identity and difference from other American Jews within the group.

We will partner with students who communicate in a Jewish language and become familiar with their experiences, senses of identity and group dynamics. Each student will partner with a language student who has a different racial, ethnic, religious, regional or experiential background from their own. We will use the knowledge gained in our
coursework to build skills needed to interact with these students, understand their situations and analyze their comments. The course will culminate in an original research project in which students will write a final project that reflects upon the cultural and identity definitions within the language group.

**HOW THIS COURSE WORKS:** The course is entirely online. All weeks will be posted online so you can get a head start on your reading. The “lecture” of the week, as well as the readings or assigned videos will be posted under “Modules.” Make sure to read the lecture carefully as I will post relevant terms and other important things you need to know.

You will be divided into four groups: Group A, Group B, Group C and Group D. Your final grade is based on two components: weekly discussion posts (worth 60% of the grade) and a final paper. Each week, one group will comment on the article or video posted under “Modules” on ELMS. Please comment in the Discussion section for that particular week. The other group will comment on the first group’s posts. The Discussion posts and responses are worth a very large portion of your grade. They are NOT just comments or “I agree” or “great description.” They are short paragraphs or mini-essays. I am not assigning a certain length, but in each post or response I want to see clear evidence that you read the article of the week, you show you can understand and summarize it, and you can take its information and write a thoughtful, informed response.

After you read the text(s) or watch the videos, if it’s your group’s turn to comment, write a clear and informed post about what you read. You can summarize for part of your post, but I want to see good-quality ANALYSIS of what you read. Do you have an opinion about it? Does it remind you of something you read previously? What terminology can you apply here? Can you relate to another text?

Because the course is so large, those of you who do not post by the Sunday night (midnight) deadline will receive a 0, with no exceptions except emergencies (with provided documentation within one week of the missed assignment). Also, even if it’s not your turn to comment or respond, please read through the posts. Other classmates will shed light on the articles that week and their comments may be helpful to your understanding.

Final project: Early in the course, you must find someone who speaks/learns/reads/writes/understands a Jewish language. It can be Hebrew, Yiddish, or a hybrid language (like “camp Hebrew,” a mix of Russian-Hebrew). You will meet with them several times (ideally) over the semester and interview them. They can be students, parents, teachers, kids. You will come up with a thesis (approved by me) and write a final paper about their experiences in relation to our course texts and your own experiences.

**Course Goals and Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- **Goal 1:** Use terminology and concepts related to contextual language learning such as mono/bi/multilingualism, foreign/second/heritage language, the native
speaker, integrative and instrumental motivation, imagined communities, target language group, prescriptivism/descriptivism, Othering, anomie, idealized L2 self, codeswitch, and language as symbolic power in weekly writing assignments and final projects.

- **Goal 2:** Demonstrate critical thinking skills as they analyze texts and creative works in Discussion section and final paper.
- **Goal 3:** Describe how language use is related to ways of thinking and culture as they will be exposed to a variety of intra-group perspectives in the scholarly articles and creative works. They will then observe, firsthand, in their research projects, how language use and background is related to how speakers self-identify and other-identify within their cultural group.
- **Goal 4:** Conduct original qualitative research. Students will conduct interviews (in English) with the language users, analyze the results, and use information gathered from articles and creative works during the semester to formulate their thesis and create a final paper.
- **Goal 5:** Synthesize information from participant interviews and articles, and form a cohesive thesis argument related to the topic of intra-group cultural and linguistic dynamics and identity formation.
- **Goal 6:** Describe the concept of culture as they analyze scholarly texts from research conducted among ethnic minority language groups and fiction and memoirs about people going through the angst, ambivalence, or acceptance of possessing multiple linguistic identities, many times within their own cultural groups.
- **Goal 7:** Analyze firsthand accounts in research studies, memoirs, and our original research how individuals' cultural beliefs and experiences within minority group settings and through interactions with (and sometimes membership in) majority group communities shape how they see themselves and how they behave and react because of their self-identification.
- **Goal 8:** Analyze their opinions and feelings about their places in their own cultural group(s), how their identity changes depending on who they are with and where they are in their lives and how this behavior affects others.
- **Goal 9:** Negotiate cross-cultural situations on several levels: through engagement with literature and research texts about experiences of minority group members, and through original research with participants involved with learning Jewish languages. They will demonstrate their sensitivity when responding to participants' personal stories and any conflicts that emerge, as well as when they write up their analysis of the experience in their final papers.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1: Begins Feb. 1:**
- Interview with Amos Oz
- Sarah Benor video on Jewish languages in America

GROUP A POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP B RESPONDS.

**Week 2: Feb. 8:**
What is culture? What is identity?
- Introductions: How do you define your identity?
- Video: Wodaabe, Herdsmen of the Sun
- Video: Hebrew charter school
- “What is Culture?” from CARLA (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition)

GROUP C POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP D RESPONDS.

**Week 3: Feb. 15:**
Subgroups within American Jewish society
- Introductions: How do you define your identity?
  *The Chosen* (Chaim Potok, 1967)
  *Becoming Frum: How Newcomers Learn the Language and Culture of Orthodox Judaism* (Bunin Benor, 2012), excerpt

GROUP B POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP A RESPONDS.

**Week 4: Feb. 22**
Imagined communities and convergence
“Putting the ‘accent’ on language perception.” (Kloosterman, 2010)

GROUP D POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP C RESPONDS.

**Week 5: Feb. 29**
Creative works on other American ethnic minority identity:
*The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (excerpts, Junot Diaz)
Interview, Maya Angelou (NPR, 2008)

GROUP A POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP B RESPONDS.

**Week 6: March 7**
Examples of Hebrew usage in the U.S. and its connection to personal and group identity formation and understanding.
“Hebrew as heritage.” (Avni, 2012)

GROUP C POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP D RESPONDS.

**Week 7: March 14:** SPRING BREAK

**Week 8: March 21:** SEND AFEUER@UMD.EDU name of person you will interview
How language is used for self-identification by excluding other groups and creating ingroup membership.
“Language of the enemy” (Pavlenko, 2003)

GROUP B POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP A RESPONDS. SEND DR. FEUER NAME OF PERSON YOU WILL INTERVIEW

**Week 9: March 28**
“Negotiating Identity: Language on the Move.” (Farrell, 2008) READ CHAPTER 2 ONLY.

GROUP D POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP C RESPONDS.
**Week 10: April 4**
An in-depth look at intra-group convergence and divergence, hierarchies, conflict and solidarity.
“Immigrant students’ heritage language and cultural identity maintenance in multilingual and multicultural societies.” (Park, 2013)
GROUP A POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP B RESPONDS.

**Week 11: April 11**
Historical look at Jewish identity, inter- and intra-group relationships and language use.
“Arguing the World” (film on Sholem Aleichem and Jewish identity, 2011)
*Apples from the Desert*, Savyon Leibrecht, 2000 (excerpts)
GROUP C POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP D RESPONDS.

**Week 12: April 18:**
Interview, Bonny Norton
Interview, Sarah Bunin Benor
GROUP B POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP A RESPONDS.

**Week 13: April 25:** SEND afeuer@umd.edu transcript from interview
Conducting qualitative research interviews
What is qualitative research?
GROUP D POSTS COMMENTS. GROUP C RESPONDS. FINAL PAPER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS DUE.

**Week 14: May 2:** SEND afeuer@umd.edu thesis and outline
Private meetings with Dr. Feuer (make appointment)
No Discussion or comments this week. FINAL PAPER THESIS AND OUTLINE DUE

**FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 12**

**Due Dates:**
Weekly Discussion Posts: Every Sunday by midnight: 60% You get 0 if you post after midnight. The way the weeks are divided, you will be writing every other week, for a total of 6 times. That means that each post is worth 10% of your grade.
Final Project: Written analysis due MAY 12, 2016 sent by EMAIL to afeuer@umd.edu 40%. Other deadlines posted below. You will lose points if you send me the preliminary components of the paper (name of person you’re interviewing, transcript, thesis and outline) late.

**Course Expectations:**
Students are expected to conduct themselves with decorum and respect in class and in online forums. They are expected to ask and answer questions, comment on course materials and engage and contribute as we create the methodology and outline for the
final research project. Attendance in class is mandatory and excused only with valid documentation. Each class will include collaboration or discussion in groups, pairs or as a whole class and students are required to participate and be involved in this work.

Grading and Learning Outcome Goals
Weekly Discussion Posts: Students will reflect upon course texts and creative works in personal writings each week. 60%

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<td>Explained how language relates to cultural values and identity</td>
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<td>Reflected upon own cultural values and experiences (*showing specifically how opinions have changed throughout the duration of this course)</td>
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Final Project: 40% of final grade. Early in the course, you must find someone who speaks/learns/reads/writes/understands a Jewish language. It can be Hebrew, Yiddish, or a hybrid language (like “camp Hebrew,” a mix of Russian-Hebrew). You will meet with them several times (ideally) over the semester and interview them. They can be students, parents, teachers, kids. You will come up with a thesis (approved by me) and write a final paper about their experiences in relation to our course texts and your own experiences.

In the final paper you must include:

- Thesis statement. Come up with a theory, or make an argument that you will prove in your paper. (Example: “I argue that Sarah’s motivation to learn Hebrew comes from her rejection of negative experiences learning Spanish as a child and desire to connect to a new peer group.”)
- Clear organization with each paragraph supporting your original argument.
- Quotes from your interview
- Use of terminology
- Compare/contrast with texts we read in class (quote them and cite them)
• Relate to your experience (optional)

The final paper must be 8-10 pages in length. Below are deadlines for each component of the paper. If you are late in sending me this information, you will lose points off the final grade.

Send professor name of person you are interviewing: March 21
Send professor transcript of your interview: April 25
Send professor thesis statement and outline of paper: May 2
Final paper due: May 12

Final Paper (Analysis of Research)

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<td>Used appropriate terminology</td>
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<td>Showed how language related to cultural values, identities and behaviors</td>
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<td>Formulated strong thesis based on course texts, original research and own experiences</td>
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University Policies:
1. **Classroom Climate** - The University of Maryland values the diversity of its student body and is committed to providing a classroom atmosphere that encourages the equitable participation of all students regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation. Potential devaluation of students in the classroom that can occur by reference to demeaning stereotypes of any group and/or overlooking the contributions of a particular group to the topic under discussion is inappropriate. (See Statement on
Classroom Climate:
http://www.umd.edu/catalog/index.cfm/show/content.section/c/27/ss/1584/s/1541

2. Students with disabilities should contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to discuss any accommodation for this course.

3. The University has approved a Code of Academic Integrity (http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html) which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, facilitating academic dishonesty, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the Internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. The following University of Maryland Honor Pledge, approved by the University Senate, should be handwritten and signed on the front page of all papers, projects or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination."

4. As of fall 2012, the University has adopted a new policy on plus/minus grading. The new edition of the Catalog reflects this policy that

   1. Students must earn a grade of C- or higher in each course counted toward a major, minor or certificate.
   2. Students matriculating in fall 2012 or later must earn a cumulative GPA of 2.0 within the major (or minor or certificate) in order to graduate.

   See detailed implementation plan for the new policy on plus/minus grading: http://www.testudo.umd.edu/plusminusimplementation.html

5. Religious observance: Please inform your instructor of any intended absences for religious observance at least two weeks in advance. Link to the University’s policy on religious observance and classroom assignments and tests: http://faculty.umd.edu/teach/attend_student.html#religious

6. Course evaluations are a part of the process by which the University of Maryland seeks to improve teaching and learning. Your participation in this official system is critical to the success of the process. All information submitted to CourseEvalUM is confidential. Instructors can only view group summaries of evaluations and cannot identify which submissions belong to which students.

7. Absences from class due to the illness of a student: (a) Students missing a single class due to illness must provide a self-signed note attesting to the date of illness. The note must also contain an acknowledgement by the student that the information is true and correct and that providing false information is prohibited.
under Code of Student Conduct. The student is also obligated to make a reasonable attempt to inform the instructor of his/her illness in advance. Note: A self-signed note does not apply to a Major Scheduled Grading Event such as previously scheduled exams, tests, quizzes, final and/or take-home exams as listed on the course syllabus or announced in class prior to the date of illness.

(b) Prolonged absence or illness preventing attendance from class requires written documentation from the Health Center and/or health care provider verifying dates of treatment and time(s) when student was unable to meet academic responsibilities.

8. **This syllabus may be subject to change.** Students will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc.

9. Unless otherwise directed, students are expected to remain in the classroom for 15 minutes in the unlikely event that the instructor should not arrive on time. After 15 minutes, it may be assumed that class will not be held.

10. Class lectures and materials are copyrighted and may not be reproduced for anything other than personal use without written permission from the professor.