

Current Issues in Anthropology:
The Anthropology of Literacy (070:299)
Professor Laura M. Ahearn

Tuesdays 2:15-5:15, Hickman 129

Spring 2013

Office Hours:

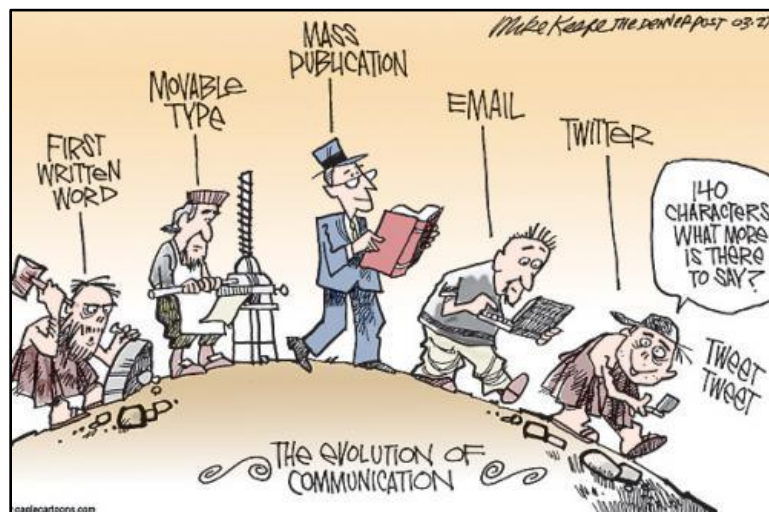
Mondays, 4:00-6:00 p.m., and by appointment

Ruth Adams Building, Room 308

Office Hours Sign-up: <http://doodle.com/tfc39zqqndpuuzd>

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This course will introduce students to anthropological perspectives on literacy. In particular, it will make students more aware of the ways in which reading and writing are embedded within particular social and cultural practices, relationships, and values. From texting to Facebook, from schoolwork to billboards, literacy saturates the lives of many (but not all) people around the world. In this course, we will explore the different ways that people use reading and writing in their everyday lives, drawing on examples such as shopping lists and love letters, and we will discuss the cultural meanings, social interactions, and hierarchical relationships that emerge from these literacy practices. Students interested in writing, education, or culture and language generally will find this course of interest.

Student Learning Outcome Goals

- a. Students will become more aware of their own and others' literacy practices.
- b. They will be able to analyze literacy practices, explaining how they emerge from particular social and cultural contexts.
- c. Students will understand the difference between literacy events and literacy practices.
- d. They will be exposed to examples of the intertwining of orality and literacy in the U.S. and in other societies.
- e. Students will leave the class with an understanding of the significance of the debate between advocates of the "autonomous" model and the "ideological" model of literacy.
- f. Students will strengthen their writing skills through multiple short essays and the final paper assignment.

This course does not fulfill any core curriculum goals, but it does fulfill the upper-level linguistic anthropology requirement.

Required and Recommended Texts

- Gershon, Ilana. 2010. *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media*. Cornell University Press. **(Required – but choose between this book and Besnier's)**
- Besnier, Niko. 1995. *Literacy, Emotion and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll*. Cambridge University Press. **(Required – but choose between this book and Gershon's)**
- Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. *Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, and Social Change in Nepal*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. **(Required – NB: I will make books available to the students with the author's 40% discount, or they can buy a used copy if they prefer.)**
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- Barton, David, et al., eds. 2000. *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. New York: Routledge. **(Recommended)**

Kral, Inge. 2012. *Talk, Text, and Technology: Literacy and Social Practice in a Remote Indigenous Community*. Buffalo: Multilingual Matters. **(Recommended)**

Assignments and Grading

- a. Weekly quizzes – 25 points each, for a total of 200 points (no make-ups; worst quiz is dropped)
- b. Essay on own literacy practices – 200 points
- c. Two in-class exams – 200 points
- d. Oral presentation on literacy practices – 300 points
- e. Class participation and active listening – 100 points

Total – 1000 points

A = 900 – 1000

C = 700 – 749

C+ = 750 – 799

B+ = 850-899

D = 600 – 700

B = 800 – 849

F = Below 600

Reading Assignments

Please be sure to read the assignment before the date for which it is assigned!

January 22nd

Introduction

January 29th

Ahearn, Laura M. 2012. "Literacy Practices." In Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hamilton, Mary. "Expanding the New Literacy Studies: Using Photographs to Explore Literacy as Social Practice." **In Barton, et al., 16-34.**

February 5th

Shirley Brice Heath, "What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School," in A. Duranti, Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 318-342.

Susan U. Philips, "Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom," in A. Duranti, Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 302-317.

February 12th

Visits from Tayo Jolaosho and Dr. Dillon Mahoney

Kell, Catherine. 2008. " 'Making Things Happen': Literacy and Agency in Housing Struggles in South Africa." Journal of Development Studies 44(6):892-912.

Mbodj-Pouye, Aissatou. 2010. "Keeping a Notebook in Rural Mali: A Practice in the Making." In David Barton and Uta Papen (eds.), The Anthropology of Writing: Understanding Textually-Mediated Worlds. London: Continuum Books, pp.126-144.

Mahoney, Dillon. 2013. "The Language of Text Messaging"

February 19th

Worden, Minky. 2012. "Text-Message Tattling." Washington Post. 25 December 2012, p. A27. http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/in-saudi-arabia-women-are-confined-by-technology/2012/12/24/75b2727c-4de4-11e2-950a-7863a013264b_story.html

Rich, Motoko. 2008. "Literacy debate: online, R U really reading?" New York Times, 27 July 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/books/27reading.html>

February 26th

Exam

March 5th

Gershon or Besnier book, first half

March 12th

Gershon or Besnier book, second half

March 19th – Spring Break

March 26th – No Class

April 2nd

Essay on own literacy practices due

Ahearn, first half

April 9th

Ahearn, second half

April 16th

Exam

April 23rd

Gupta, Akhil. 2012. "Chapter Five: 'Let the Train Run on Paper': Bureaucratic Writing as State Practice." In *Red Tape: Bureacracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp.141-190.

Hull, Matthew S. 2012. "Introduction." From Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan. Berkeley: University of California Press.

OPTIONAL: Tusting, Karen. 2010. "Eruptions of Interruptions: Managing Tensions between Writing and Other Tasks in a Textualized Childcare Workplace." In David Barton and Uta Papen (eds.), The Anthropology of Writing: Understanding Textually-Mediated Worlds. London: Continuum Books, pp.67-89.

April 30th

Oral presentations in class

NO FINAL EXAMS OR PAPERS – HAPPY SUMMER!