# LING 2050.008
# The Language of Now: Pop Culture, Technology, and Society

**Instructor**   Dr. Nicholas A. Lester
**Email**        Nicholas.Lester@unt.edu
**Term**         Spring 2026
**Meetings**     MW 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM
**Classroom**    LANG 322
**Office Hours**  MW 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM or by appointment
**Office**       LANG 409L

## Recommended text

McCulloch, G. (2019). *Because Internet*. New York: Riverhead Books.

## Materials you'll need for class

- Pen or pencil
- Composition book or notebook
- Laptop or tablet

## Course Objectives

The Language of Now explores the relationship among pop culture, social media, digital communication, and their effect on language. Language is changing more rapidly than ever, not because of migration or colonization, but because of the rapid growth around social media apps, streaming platforms, online gaming, and more. Research in this course involves collecting and analyzing data from its source—the internet. This includes slang, emojis, memes, fandoms, videos, and music to name a few. Language overlays everything; pop culture, in all its digital splendor, impacts language. This course will take us on a journey of linguistic discovery, zooming in on the language around us—not in a vacuum but where we live.

### Questions that we will address and explore this semester include
- How is rapidly changing technology, social media, and pop culture affecting contemporary language and slang?
- How has the language you speak now changed from 10 years ago?
- How are texting, gaming, fandoms, and social media language changing the way we speak, think, and write?
- How do world events influence the Language of Now?
- How does the slang we use weave connections among our social circles?
- What accounts for the generational differences in texting, slang use, emojis, and stylistics?
- How do social and political movements influence the Language of Now? Think about the following movements: Black Lives Matter, Me Too movement, 4B movement.

- Why do some slang terms have more staying power than others?
- What are some slang terms that have shifted in meaning from their historical definition, e.g. "I'm *obsessed* with this lippy" versus "I'm *obsessed* with fighting for human rights"
- What do emojis do? How and why do we use them?
- Why are there generational differences in slang usage, emojis, and punctuation/capitalization (stylistics)? What are some examples?
- What is a meme, and how do they spread? How do memes change during their lifespan?
- What are "language attitudes" and what influence do they have on us?
- What is language variation, dialect, and accent?
- How does the slang we use connect us to social groups? How might it exclude us?
- What is discriminatory language and where do we find it on the internet? *Hint: it's often found in comments, but it can also be coded and only understood by a particular group (dog whistles).*
- What are some guidelines for monitoring and decreasing discriminatory language on the internet?

## Sensitivity Warning

Please be mindful of the slang terms you collect, select, discuss, and analyze. As a class and individually, we want to avoid using terms that have been weaponized to put down, subjugate, or insult an entire group of people.

## Grading

| Assessment Type | Number | Grade Weight |
|---|---|---|
| **Weekly Homework**<br>▪ Assignments<br>▪ Discussions Posts<br>▪ Quizzes | 13 | 50% |
| **Projects** | 3 | 45% |
| **Test** | 1 | 5% |

Note: *I will drop one or two weekly grades. This will allow you to miss at least one quiz, assignment, or discussion.*

## Assignments

**Test:** You will have one test. It will cover the class lectures and assigned readings. It is objective and straightforward. If you attend class regularly, take notes, and read all assigned articles, you will likely do fine on the test. The test is online, in Canvas.

**Projects:** You will complete three projects this semester. These projects will be based on the exploratory research you conduct. I will provide you with detailed requirements and rubrics for all projects, and we'll spend some class time working on the projects.

**Quizzes and Assignments:** You will have quizzes throughout the semester. Most of them will be based on the articles you read. You will also have one or two weekly assignments. I'll provide you with details on all these items in advance.

**Discussion Forums**: You will have assigned discussion forums. For these, you will follow the prompt and use the grading rubric as a guideline.

## Discussion Grading Rubric

| Rubric Qualifications for Discussion posts | Points |
|---|---|
| Original post with relevant, cogent examples and commentary; two responses to other posts (your peers in the discussion board). Responses address content in the post, engaging and extending the discussion | 20 pts |
| Original post with examples; two responses to other posts. Responses relate to the post and extend discussion. | 18 pts |
| Original post with no examples; two responses to other posts | 16 pts |
| Original post; one response to other posts | 14 pts |
| No original post; two responses to other posts<br>Or original post only. | 10 pts |

## Attendance

**Attendance is required since our classroom is our laboratory. Over 4 absences may affect your final grade. I will take roll each class period. Please stay home if you are sick.**

## Weekly Plan

| Week | Dates | Topic | Due |
|------|-------|-------|-----|
| Week 1 | Jan 12<br>Jan 14 | Introduction | - **Read "Gen-Z Slang Is Revolutionizing Work Jargon"**<br>- **Quiz 1** |
| Week 2 | Jan 21 | MLK Day (no class) + Components of language | - **Read "Why Slang is more revealing than you may realize"**<br>- **Quiz 2** |
| Week 3 | Jan 26<br>Jan 28 | Semantic shift | - **Read Week 3 materials**<br>- **Weekly Assignment** |
| Week 4 | Feb 2<br>Feb 4 | Word formation processes | - **Read Week 4 materials**<br>- **Discussion post**<br>- **Project 1 assigned** |
| Week 5 | Feb 9<br>Feb 11 | Lexical categories + Grammaticalization | - **Read Week 5 materials**<br>- **Practice Quiz (not for a grade)**<br>- **Test 1**<br>  - **Opens Feb 9 at 12:01 AM**<br>  - **Closes Feb 15 at 11:59 PM** |
| Week 6 | Feb 16<br>Feb 18 | Lexical analysis of LON | - **Read Week 6 materials**<br>- **Look over past Project 1 submissions**<br>- **Discussion post** |
| Week 7 | Feb 23<br>Feb 25 | Project 1 workshop + Poster presentations | - **Rough drafts of Project 1 presentations (for class)**<br>- **Project 1** |
| Week 8 | Mar 2<br>Mar 4 | Language Variation | - **Read *English with an Accent* Ch. 1**<br>- **Terminology practice quiz**<br>- **Quiz 3** |
|  | Mar 9<br>Mar 11 | Spring Break (no class) | - **No homework** |

| Week 9 | Mar 16<br>Mar 18 | **Language Attitudes** | - **Read Week 9 materials**<br>- **Discussion post**<br>- **(Project 2 assigned)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Week 10 | Mar 23<br>Mar 25 | **Social groups +<br>Generational differences** | - **Read Week 10 materials**<br>- **Discussion post**<br>- **(Project 2 workshop)** |
| Week 11 | Mar 30<br>Apr 1 | **Memes + emoji** | - **Read *Because Internet* Ch. 5**<br>- **Discussion post** |
| Week 12 | Apr 6<br>Apr 8 | **Gricean Maxims +<br>Speech Acts** | - **Readings in module**<br>- **Project 2**<br>- **(Project 3 assigned)** |
| Week 13 | Apr 13<br>Apr 15 | **Microaggressions** | - **Read Week 13 materials**<br>- **Discussion post** |
| Week 14 | Apr 20<br>Apr 22 | **Discriminatory language** | - **Read Week 14/16 (Disc. Lg.)<br>materials**<br>- **Quiz 4** |
| Week 15 | Apr 27<br>Apr 29 | **AI and Language of Now** | - **Read Week 14/16 (AI)<br>materials**<br>- **Weekly assignment** |
| Week 16 | May 4<br>May 6 | **Finals Week (no class)** | - **Project 3** |

*This syllabus is subject to change.*

**Canvas:** We will use Canvas for accessing course information, content, grades, schedules, quizzes, discussion forums, the one test, and project submissions. Everything you need to reference for the course is in Canvas; all submissions will go into a portal in Canvas.