



New York University – College of Arts and Science

Department of Linguistics

The Linguistics of Names (LING-UA 2)

Instructor Information

- Instructor name and department: Prof. Laurel MacKenzie – Linguistics; Prof. Lisa Davidson – Linguistics
- Office hours:
 - Laurel: Most Thursdays 2–4, 10 Washington Place, Room 305, but check availability (and book a meeting at another time if needed) here: <https://calendly.com/laurel-mackenzie>
 - Lisa: Tuesdays 10-12, 10 Washington Place, Room 505, or by appointment (please email)
- Email: laurel.mackenzie@nyu.edu; lisa.davidson@nyu.edu
- More info: <http://www.laurelmackenzie.com>; https://wp.nyu.edu/lisa_davidson/

Course Information

- Fall 2025: Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30-1:45
- Lecture locations: 10 Washington Place, Room 104
- 4 credits
- Pre/co-requisites: none
- Course website: NYU Brightspace

Course Description

This course is a general introduction to linguistic analysis through the study of personal, product, and place names. Throughout the course, we will use linguistic data to assess whether names constitute a special component of language, or whether they behave linguistically like non-name words. Topics include trends in naming and the diffusion of linguistic innovations, the phonological processes involved in nickname formation, sound symbolism, place names and their connection to settlement history, sociodemographic correlates of name choice, names and the mind/brain, and naming and identity. Students will gain hands-on experience working with linguistic data by analyzing patterns in names.

Course Goals / Objectives

Through successfully completing this course, you will:



- Become keen observers and analysts of the structure and use of the names and the language that you encounter in daily life
- Gain familiarity with specific concepts from phonetics, phonology, morphology, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics
- Learn to interpret and critically evaluate academic literature
- Gain hands-on experience collecting, analyzing, and writing about linguistic data, both quantitative and qualitative
- Be able to discuss matters of language variation with scientific rigor and cultural sensitivity

Course Materials

Required Readings & Materials

- All readings and other course materials will be made available as PDFs or Google Docs, linked via our class Brightspace page.

Resources

- **How to succeed in this course:**
 - ☑ Attend all lectures, pay attention, ask questions, and take notes. Consider copying the lecture slides to your own Google Drive at the beginning of class and taking notes directly on them.
 - ☑ As soon as you get a chance after each lecture, revisit and organize your notes from class by looking back over them, alongside the lecture slides and the reading, to solidify your understanding.
 - ☑ Do the reading assigned to a lecture before the lecture it's assigned to.
 - ☑ Make note of where you have questions about the lectures or the readings. Bring your questions to office hours.
 - ☑ Get to know your instructors and others in the class.
 - ☑ Start your assignments as soon as you get them.
 - ☑ Seek help on your assignments well before they are due.
- **Access your course materials:** <http://brightspace.nyu.edu>
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** [Bobst Library](#)
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** [NYU Writing Center](#)
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](#)
- **Tutoring and academic skills workshops are offered by the University Learning Center:** www.nyu.edu/cas/clc
- **Support for personal and health-related issues at the Wellness Exchange:** (212) 443-9999 (24/7 confidential calls): www.nyu.edu/999



Course Policies

CAS Academic Policies can be found at

<https://cas.nyu.edu/academic-programs/bulletin/policies/academic-policies.html>.

Further information on all assignments, course requirements, and assessment/evaluation of student work will be provided both in class meetings and on Brightspace.

Attendance and Tardiness

The lectures of this class are designed to be interactive. You already know a lot about linguistics, even if you don't realize it, purely by virtue of being a language user in the world. For this reason, we will often solicit your experiences and encourage your contributions in lecture.

Please come to class! You will not only learn better by participating and asking questions, but you will enlighten your colleagues and improve the class by sharing your expertise as a language user.

Also, the lecture slides for this course are intentionally minimalist. The slides are meant to be visual aids, not lecture scripts. If you miss a lecture, you will need to get notes from a classmate to reconstruct the content of the class and understand how to do the homework.

Though we encourage you to come to lecture for all of the above reasons, we will not formally assess your lecture attendance.

Assignment Deadlines & Late Assignments

Assignments for this class are always due at 8pm. However, all assignments also have a grace period: we will accept them until 11am the next day without penalty. But please try your hardest to get your assignments in before the 8pm deadline. Sleep is important, and this class probably isn't worth staying up all night for.

This grace period cannot be extended without explicit permission from one of the instructors. If you know you are going to need more time on an assignment, or if you miss a deadline due to circumstances out of your control, you must speak to one of the instructors face-to-face to arrange a revised deadline. This can be an informal chat before/after class, or you can set up an appointment — the important thing is that we work together to construct a reasonable and achievable timeline for completing the work. Work that is submitted after the grace period ends — by even one minute — will not be accepted without this meeting with the professor. Extensions will not be granted by email.

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating (adapted from the website of the College of Arts and Science, <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>):



Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else's idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).

Disability Disclosure Statement

New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students of all abilities. We work with NYU students to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations that support equal access to a world-class education.

Students requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center for Student Accessibility as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Student Accessibility

Telephone: 212-998-4980

Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Email: mosescsd@nyu.edu

Wellness Statement

In a large, complex community like New York University, it's vital to reach out to others, particularly those who are isolated or engaged in self-destructive activities. Student wellness (<https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-programs/student-wellness.html>) is the responsibility of us all.

The NYU [Wellness Exchange](#) is the constellation of NYU's programs and services designed to address the overall health and mental health needs of its students. Students can access this service 24 hours a day, seven days a week: wellness.exchange@nyu.edu; (212) 443-9999. Students may also call the Wellness Exchange hotline (212-443-9999) or the NYU Counseling Service (212-998-4780) to make an appointment for single session, short-term, or group counseling sessions.



Assignments/Requirements and Grading Breakdown

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/ Activities	Description	% of Final Grade
Homework assignments	Homeworks will involve analyzing and/or discussing new data, based on topics that have been covered in class (4 HW assignments).	25%
Digital portfolio	You will be given brief assignments asking you to observe something particular in the language around you. You will record your observations and reflections on them in a digital portfolio using the app Padlet (4 Padlets).	20%
Critical review	<p>A write-up of 2-3 pages about a scholarly article. This review is not just a summary, but must also contain some critical thinking about the research. For example: Do you agree with the author(s)' conclusions? Was their methodology adequate for testing their hypotheses? Did they fail to address any issues that you thought of when reading the paper? For the critical review, you can pick from one of two papers (listed on More Tools > Calendar > List on Brightspace). In preparation for analyzing a scholarly article, you will read and leave comments on two articles that will be discussed in class. Comments account for 10%, and the critical review for 15%.</p> <p>For commenting on the two papers, you will leave your questions in the textbox for this assignment on Brightspace. You can ask for clarifications about methods or terminology, but these cannot not be the only questions you ask. Instead, consider questions or comments about the meaning of the study, point out limitations, make links to other topics we've discussed in class, or add a possible extension that a future study could address. If you are responding to a particular passage in the text, please copy and paste that section into the textbox as well and make note of what page it is on.</p>	25%



Final project	There are 3 options for this assignment: A 3-minute video interview, a 5-minute slideshow expanding on a class topic for a Nerd Nite-style audience, or a novel research project proposal (culminating in a 5-minute slideshow). This assignment will comprise a 1-2 page proposal (10%) and the video/slideshow (20%), to be presented in class on one of the final days.	30%
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Class Grade

The final class grade will be assigned as in the chart below, with the start of the range for each grade as follows:

0	F
64	D
67	D+
70	C-
74	C
77	C+
80	B-
84	B
87	B+
90	A-
94	A



September 2025

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1 Labor Day	2 Classes begin Lecture 1 - Intro/overview	3	4 Lecture 2 - Intro to sounds 1 Assigned: Padlet 0 (setup, ungraded)	5	6
7	8	9 Lecture 3 - Intro to sounds 2	10 Due: Padlet 0 (setup, ungraded)	11 Lecture 4 - Intro to sounds 3 Assigned: HW1: History of my name	12	13
14	15	16 Lecture 5 - Activities: name blends, name bingo	17 Due: HW1 (History of my name)	18 Lecture 6 - Naming & change Assigned: Padlet 1 (name transcription)	19	20
21	22 Autumnal Equinox	23 Lecture 7 - Exploring trends in baby name data	24 Due: Padlet 1 (name transcription)	25 Lecture 8 - Naming & gender Assigned: HW2: Trends in name data	26	27
28	29	30 Lecture 9 - Naming & gender, continued; Exploring trends in naming & gender				

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October 2025

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
			1 Due: HW2 (Trends in name data)	2 Lecture 10 - Sound symbolism Assigned: Padlet 2 (sound symbolism)	3	4
5	6	7 Lecture 11 - Nickname formation	8 Due: Padlet 2 (sound symbolism)	9 Lecture 12 - Nickname formation, continued Assigned: HW3: Dutch nicknames	10	11
12	13 Indigenous Peoples' Day	14 Legislative Day - Monday schedule (class will not meet)	15 Due: HW3 (Dutch nicknames)	16 Lecture 13 - Activities: nicknames & child lg, unusual truncations Assigned: Padlet 3 (nicknames)	17	18
19	20	21 Lecture 16 - Names & settlement history	22 Due: Padlet 3 (nicknames)	23 Lecture 17 - Naming around the world Assigned: HW4: PA placenames	24	25
26	27	28 Lecture 18 - Activities: naming around the world (English-to-Spanish; Zulu); interpreting statistics	29 Due: HW4 (PA Placenames)	30 Lecture 19 - Immigrant names Assigned: Read bias paper to prepare for CAR Assigned: Project proposal	31 Halloween	
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November 2025

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4 Lecture 20 - Immigrant names, Foreign placename pronunciation	5 Due: Bias paper comments	6 Lecture 21 - Naming, discrimination, and bias, in-class bias paper discussion Assigned: Read brand name paper to prepare for CAR Assigned: Critical article review	7	8
9	10	11 Lecture 22 - Naming, discrimination, and bias, continued	12 Due: Project proposal, brand name paper comments	13 Lecture 14 - Brand names, in-class brand name paper discussion	14	15
16	17	18 Lecture 15 - Brand names, continued	19 Due: Critical article review	20 Lecture 23 - Psycholinguistics of names Assigned: Padlet 4 (brand names), work on project	21	22
23	24	25 Lecture 24 - Guest lecture on bird names by Dr. Erin Morrison, NYU Liberal Studies	26 Due: Padlet 4 (brand names)	27 No class Thanksgiving Day	28	29
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December 2025

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2 Lecture 25 - Psycholinguistics of names, continued	3	4 Lecture 26 - Project presentations	5	6
7	8	9 Lecture 27 - Project presentations	10	11 Last day of classes Lecture 28 - Project presentations	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Hanukkah	Exam period	Exam period	Exam period	Exam period	Exam period	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Winter Solstice			Christmas Eve	Christmas Day		
28	29	30	31			

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