

FRE 201 – Spring 2021  
Prof. Eric Louis Russell  
Department of French & Italian  
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**“A critical history of French: Languages, powers, and ideologies”**

Description

This seminar is intended to frame two scholarly moments: one, an exploration of the social history of the French language, especially focusing on the emergence and cohesion of this as an anthropological and epistemological ideation; and two, an unraveling of the socio-cultural forces that served to construct this episteme and to promote this cohesion, frequently at the expense of other language communities and their cultures/practices. We will interrogate how French emerged and came to take its cultural, political, and linguistic form, and how this trajectory can help us understand contemporary issues surrounding language in society, more broadly.

Rather than only concentrate on dates and events in the history of French (we will also do this, if only as a type of baseline), we will interrogate historical pathways and outcomes as intrinsically bound up in extra-linguistic power structures and cultural institutions. The readings of this class reflect our dual objectives: Lodge will serve as a reference and jumping off point for the discussion of historical moments, allowing us to describe language within and across historical moments with appropriate terminology and concepts; Heller & McElhinney will frame our examination and re-examination of how such moments and the forces contributing to them can be critically interrogated and the power structures contributing to them made clearer.

A tertiary, but equally important objective is the development of disciplinary writing practices. All students will be expected to contribute a term paper in which they delimit a question of sociolinguistic historic significance: this requires them to present basic diachronic facts, articulate a critical argument within the scope of the seminar and readings, frame a cogent argument pertaining to the political and social significance of the moment/moments in question, as well as relevant actors and forces, and engage with this in a way that reflects appropriate disciplinary postures. This is intended to give students practical experience with the type of scholarship undertaken in the course, while also providing a chance to hone writing skills and develop solid scholarly habits.

At the end of the quarter, you should know/understand better:

- The ways in which language status and function can be described; how these statuses and functions have changed in the context of French over time
- The ways in which language is both used as an expression of social power and how it is shaped by this power; how this applies to the case of French and language(s) in the Francophone space
- The ways in which language is imbued with ideology and simultaneously serves ideological constructs; how the history of the French language (broadly speaking) can be understood in socio-constructive manners

By the end of the quarter, you should be able to:

- Describe French and the languages of the Francophone spaces (social, geographic, cultural) in terms of their statuses, functions, and socio-cultural construction

- Criticize the historicity of changes pertinent to these conceptualizations of both French and other languages
- Articulate a pertinent argument, in which you engage with concepts and theories to develop a reasoned approach to the understanding of a particular facet of French (or a cogent language), in a particular space, at a particular time.

Texts (both are required, although any edition is fine: shop around for a good price and don't forget to look at used booksellers online)

Lodge, R.A. *French: From Dialect to Standard*. London: Routledge.

Heller, M. and B. McElhinney. *Language, Capitalism, Colonialism: Toward a critical history*. U of Toronto Press.

Other readings (chapters, articles) will be distributed via Canvas.

### Course work

In addition to attending all seminar meetings and participating in discussion, students will complete the following tasks:

- Chapter précis: synthesize and summarize readings (25% of grade; one student will be assigned to lead discussion each week, beginning week 2)
- Pre-writing assignments (25% of grade)
  - o Research question: due week 3
  - o Annotated preliminary/tentative reading list: due week 4
  - o Abstract: due week 5
  - o Apologia: due week 6
  - o Developed skeleton: due week 7
  - o Lit review/background: due week 8
  - o Presentation: due week 9
- Final paper, due on scheduled exam time/day as determined by registrar's calendar (50% of grade)

For students pursuing a French MA/PhD, all writing should be done in French. Other students may write in English or, in consultation with the professor, a language that is mutually comprehensible.