



School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies Course Outline

LALS 519, Corpus-based study of register variation, Trimester 1, 2009

1. Course Coordinator:

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2. Staff: Douglas Biber

3. Class times and rooms: Monday-Friday 4-6 pm, Murphy Building Room 301, from Monday 20 April to Friday 1 May inclusive.

Online Enrolment is now available for students wanting to study at Victoria University in 2009. The website is www.victoria.ac.nz/enrol

4. Announcements: MA noticeboard Level 2 Von Zedlitz

Some additional information relevant to this course can be found in the School MA Handbook. The handbook is available on the web.

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/degrees/masters.aspx>

5. LALS main office: VZ 210, 2nd floor Von Zedlitz Building, Kelburn Parade

6. LALS 522 Course Administrator: Rachel Scholes, Postgraduate administration
 Tel: 463 5600/463 5255/472 1000 ext 8386
 Web contact: www.blackboard.vuw.ac.nz

7. Aims: This course focuses on the study of 'registers': textual varieties associated with a particular situation of use (e.g., conversation, classroom teaching, email messages, term papers, textbooks, novels). All languages are composed of many registers, and every speaker controls multiple registers. The course introduces the theoretical concept of register, in comparison to the concepts of 'genre' and 'style'. Students will learn methods for analyzing registers and genres, learn about the linguistic characteristics of several key registers/genres in English, and carry out register/genre analyses of selected textual varieties.

8. Objectives: By the end of the course, course members should be able to

1. recognize the range of spoken and written registers in English
2. distinguish between the theoretical notions of *register*, *genre*, and *style*
3. carry out your own register/genre analyses, including:

- the typical *situational characteristics* of a register,
 - the typical *linguistic characteristics* of a register,
 - the *conventional characteristics* of a genre,
 - functional interpretation of the situational and linguistic patterns
4. have an understanding of the overall patterns of variation among spoken and written registers in English
 5. have an understanding of the theoretical importance of register studies for (socio)linguistics and for language pedagogy

9. Content: The following topics will be covered in the course. The reading for each topic is indicated in brackets; all readings are taken from Biber and Conrad, unless otherwise indicated. The full references can be found in the table of contents of the set readings.

Overview of course. [Chapter 1: registers, dialects, genres, styles.]

Situational analysis of registers [Chapter 2].

Linguistic analysis of registers [Chapter 3], Introduction to corpus-based analysis.

Conversation [Chapter 4]

Written registers, genres, styles [Chapter 5]. Corpus-based analysis II: tagged texts.

Historical register/genre/style analysis. [Chapter 6]

E-registers. [Chapter 7]

Register variation and Multi-dimensional analysis. [Chapter 8]

Theoretical issues. [Chapter 9]

10. Texts: The set text for the course *Register, Genre, Style* (Biber and Conrad) – this will be a book ms or proofs.

11. Assessment: The course will be assessed by an assignment worth 60% of the final grade and two tasks totalling 40% of the final grade.

The assignment is due by Friday 29 May 2009. Assignments are expected to be around 3,000 words.

The tasks are due on the following dates. Each task is expected to be around 500 words or less.

Task 1 23 April (20% of the final grade)

Task 2 28 April (20% of the final grade)

Assignment 29 May 2009 (60% of final grade)

Tasks and assignments can be submitted as e-mail attachments. Please submit each one as a single document in either WORD or WordPerfect format, and e-mail them to LALS-522@vuw.ac.nz. If you send them by post, please include **two** copies of each assignment or task. The other will be retained for external examining. The postal address is on page 1 of this outline. The assignment topics and tasks are described in this course outline.

Assignment: Final project

Based on a survey of prior research (e.g., from the book bibliography and chapters from the book itself), choose a research topic or issue related to the comparison of two or more registers. Survey previous research on this topic, and then design your own research study to answer specific research questions about these registers.

Then carry out a study to answer these research questions, including collecting texts that represent the target registers (in the form of an electronic corpus, unless otherwise justified), deciding on the linguistic characteristics to analyze (i.e., choosing features that are related to the research issues of your study), and analyzing the distribution and use of those linguistic features in the texts of your sample.

1) Introduction and discussion of previous research studies. What registers are investigated? What are the major goals of the study? What are the specific research questions investigated in the study? Does the introduction fully survey previous research in this area? Is the study motivated relative to previous research? [10 points]

- 2) Clear statement of the general goals of the study and the specific research questions to be investigated, plus motivating the study: why is this interesting, relative to what we already know and do not know about this topic from previous research? [5 points]
- 3) Describe the sample of texts used for the study, the linguistic features chosen for analysis (and operational definitions when they are important), and methodological considerations in carrying out the analysis. Evaluate the extent to which this sample of texts 'represents' the target registers, and discuss why these linguistic features are appropriate for the research questions of the study. [10 points]
- 4) Methodology: what methods were used? Are these methods appropriate for the research goals of the study? What specific procedures were used for analyzing linguistic features and their distribution? Is the description of methods clear and justified? [5 points]
- 5) Findings: Describe the major patterns of register variation. Does the study adequately explain/interpret the patterns? What do these patterns tell us about the target registers? Did the study achieve the research goals? Are the specific research questions adequately answered? [10 points]
- 5) Discuss the patterns of variation and provide a functional interpretation of why the registers differ in the way that they do. Discuss what is controversial/interesting about the findings? Interpret patterns relative to previous research? [10 points]
- 6) Bibliography: complete and follows either LSA, MLA, or APA style [3 points]
- 7) All tables and figures are clear [2 points]
- 8) overall writing quality and editing [5 points]

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Tasks

The two tasks total 40% of the final grade. They must be submitted on the assigned dates. The answers to each task should typically fit within two pages. The tasks are designed to draw on set reading and to get you to apply ideas covered in the course.

Task 1: Activity 3.8 from Biber and Conrad (20 points)

Grading Rubric

Category	Points	Comments
Listing of explicit operational definitions for each feature of analysis, along with your rationale for your decisions and examples illustrating the operational definitions.	/ 5 pts.	
Includes 12-15 linguistic features, with motivation for why these were chosen	/ 3 pts.	
Tables containing the quantitative results for each text sample and each register, including raw and	/ 5 pts.	

normed (per 100 words) counts of each feature, and average scores for each register.		
Prose discussion of the major quantitative differences, along with an interpretation of these differences.	/ 7 pts.	
TOTAL	/ 20 pts.	

Task 2: Activity 7, 8, or 9 from Ch 5, Biber and Conrad (20 points)

Grading Rubric

Category	Points	Comments
Introduce and motivate the selection of texts and the particular registers chosen for comparison	/ 2 pts.	
Listing of explicit operational definitions for each feature of analysis, along with your rationale for your decisions and examples illustrating the operational definitions.	/ 3 pts.	
Includes > 10 linguistic features, with motivation for why these were chosen	/ 2 pts.	
Tables containing the quantitative results for each text sample and each register, including raw and normed (per 100 words) counts of each feature, and average scores for each register.	/ 3 pts.	
Prose discussion of the major situational differences.	/ 3 pts.	
Prose discussion of the major quantitative linguistic differences, along with an interpretation of these differences.	/ 7 pts.	

TOTAL	/ 20 pts.	

12. Penalties: Assignments and tasks must be submitted by the due date. There is no penalty for late submission but permission must be sought and a good reason given. Try to keep within the word limits especially for the tasks. Assignments and tasks which are plagiarised will not receive a grade and cannot be resubmitted.

13. Relationship between assessment and course objectives:

The assignment provides an opportunity to evaluate research, plan teaching, and carry out a small scale research project. The tasks assess the practical application of ideas and comprehension of the set texts and set readings.

14. Workload: LALS 519 is a fifteen point one-trimester paper. Course members should expect to spend about 120 hours on all the work for this course including lectures.

15. Mandatory Course Requirements (Terms): There are minimum course requirements which must be satisfied to be assessed for the final grade. In order to meet these requirements, course members must

complete the tasks

attend all the ten classes

complete the assignment.

16. Attendance: Course members must attend all ten lectures. If an absence is unavoidable, then the course member should contact the course coordinator for information on how to make up for the absence.

GENERAL UNIVERSITY STATUTES AND POLICIES

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the *Victoria University Calendar* or go to the Academic Policy and Student Policy sections on:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy>

This website also provides information for students in a number of areas including Academic Grievances, Student and Staff conduct, Meeting the needs of students with impairments, and student support/VUWSA student advocates.