

Language and Religion

Anth 3609/

Instructor: Joel Kuipers

T-Th 11.10-12.25 pm

CRN: 33382

Duques room 361

Religion and language are among the most complex, defining, and intensely felt symbolic expressions of humankind. Can the study of language provide us with insights into religion? Conversely, can the study of religion reveal the shared nature of linguistic experience? This course explores how the study of language and religion can mutually inform one another. We will investigate first how both emerged – separately - as objects of systematic study in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, informed by similar evolutionary, structural and functional approaches. Religion and language come together most prominently, however, in self consciously “marked” forms of discourse, such as religious speech registers, including magical chants, mythical narratives, blasphemy, sacred texts, verbal attributions of agency, and expressions of pious subjectivity. Students will explore these topics theoretically and ethnographically with original research projects.



Prerequisite: Anth 1004 or equivalent; Anth 1002 helpful.

Contact info for Kuipers

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Office hours: Thursday 1-3 pm

1) August 28. Introduction and organization

2) August 30. Religion in Anthropology – Early Evolutionary Approaches

Read: 1) General Introduction in Lambek ed. 2) Tylor “Religion in Primitive Culture” 3) Durkheim “Elementary Forms of Religious Life” 4) Weber “Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.”

In class essay on approaches to the sociology of religion

3) September 4: The Linguistic Method in Ethnography – Role of Language in Anthropology – from a tool to a metaphor for culture itself

Read: 1) Hymes “Linguistic Method in Ethnography”

4) September 6. Language as a way of talking *about* religion

Read: 1) Geertz “Religion as a Cultural System” 2) Pouillon “Remarks on the Verb “To Believe”” 3) Ruel “Christians as Believers”

In class essay on comparing the role of language in studying social life

5) September 11. Vocabulary of Religion: Semantic forms

Read: 1) Frake “Structural Analysis of Subanun Religious Behavior” 2) Langer “The Logic of Signs and Symbols” 3) Douglas “Land Animals, Pure and Impure”

6) September 13. Symbolic forms.

Read: 1) Evans-Pritchard “The Problem of Symbols” 2) Ortner “On Key Symbols” 3) Wolf “Virgin of Guadalupe”

7) September 18. Functional Approaches: Language does things

Read: 1) Malinowski "Ethnographic Theory of Language" 2) Malinowski "Myth in Primitive Psychology"

In class essay on the function of religious language

Paper proposals due: September 27: 2-3 pages: In this assignment, construct three proposals for research papers. Follow the proposal guide and write approximately 200 word abstracts. They may be related topics. Cite at least 3 sources for each abstract. Post on BB.

8) September 20. Structural Approaches

Read: 1) Levi-Strauss "The Sorcerer and his Magic" 2) Levi-Strauss "The effectiveness of symbols"

9) September 25. Moral Inversions, Blasphemy and Linguistic Disorder

Read: 1) Radin "Winnebago Trickster Figure" 2) Stallybrass and White "Politics and Poetics of Transgression" 3) Bakhtin, MM "Rabelais and his World" (excerpts).4) Abrahams and Bauman "Carnival..."

10) September 27: Blasphemy as Transgression

Read: 1) David Lawton "Speaking Blasphemy" 2) Lawton "Judging Blasphemy" 3) Keane "Freedom and Blasphemy: On Indonesian Press Bans and Danish Cartoons"

11) October 2. . Religious Language as a Practice

Read: 1) Jakobson "The Concept of the Mark" 2) Keane "Language and Religion"

12) October 4. Ritual Speech

Read: 1) Tambiah "A Performative Approach to Ritual"

13) October 9. Movement in Ritual.

Read: 1) Tambiah "Form and Meaning in Magical Acts" 2) Turner "Communitas and Liminality"

14) October 11 Movement in ritual speech: Entextualization.

Read: 1) Kuipers “Obligations to the Word: Ritual Speech, Performance and Responsibility among the Weyewa” in Hill and Irvine ed. Responsibility and Evidence 2) Bauman and Briggs “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspective on Language and Social Life

15) October 16. Gender, Subjectivity and Agency

Read: 1) Kuipers “Talking About Troubles” 2) Benveniste “Subjectivity in Language” 3) Ahearn “Agency and Language”

16) October 18 Agency and Religion

Read: 1) Barrett, Justin “ Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion” in Religion and Cognition; 2) Maccauley (excerpts) “Religion is natural and science is not.”

17) October 23. Civilizational Perspectives: Sanskrit, Islam, Latin

Read: 1) Sheldon Pollock “Cosmopolis” 2) Ricci “Islam Translated” 3) Burke “A Sketch for a Social History of post-Medieval Latin”

18) October 25. Language and Religion in Colonialism and Capitalism

Read: 1) Keane “Sincerity, Modernity and the Protestants” 2) Vincent Rafael “Politics of Translation” in White Love.

19) October 30. Midterm. ID and Essay questions

20) November 1. Contemporary Fundamentalisms and Mediated Communication

Read: 1) Susan Harding “The Politics of Apocalyptic Language” 2) Harding and Stewart “Bad Endings: American Apocalypse

21) November 6. Textuality and Intertextuality in everyday religious discourse

Read: 1) Meigs Ritual Language in Everyday Life: The Christian Right” 2) TBA

22) November 8. Internet and Religiosity

Read: 1) Armfield and Holbert “Relation between Religiosity and Internet Use”

Drafts of papers due. November 8. Post your papers on Blackboard. All students are required to choose 5 other papers and comment on them on in Blackboard.

Approximately 10 pages. In this paper, you should present 1) revised thesis statement and revised literature review; 2) statement of methods (including how you selected the data you’re using), how you’re analyzing it. 3) classification of the types of data you’ll bring to bear on your argument and why you’ve used that scheme 4) examples of each type of data (usually in text or transcript form). Each snippet of text that you provide should be preceded by an explanation of the overall context of what is going on that makes the utterances make sense; it should be followed by a discussion of why this particular example is important and fits into the general classification scheme that you have laid out. 10 pages in addition to your literature review.

23) November 13. Religion and New Media.

Read: 1) Cho “Religion and New Media Research” 2) Sands “Muslims, Identity and Multimodal Communication on the Internet”

24) November 15. No class. Comments on five papers due. . Write one paragraph on each paper by 1) summarizing the central argument and its support; 2) evaluate the claim 3) evaluate the quality of the data 4) evaluate the strength of the data supporting the claim 5) evaluate the justification of the project (the “why we should care” statement).

25) November 20. Presentations

26) November 27. Presentations

27) November 29. Presentations

28) December 4. Presentations and Conclusions

Bibliographic essays due December 4th.

FINAL PAPERS DUE on day of final exam.

Learning Goals

- Learn to identify, produce and evaluate narratives of the history of the anthropological study of religion.
- Learn to identify, produce and evaluate the history of the anthropological study of

language.

- Learn how religious discourse is “marked” poetically, and how this marking functions in the organization of society.
- Learn to identify and evaluate competing interpretations of these structures and functions in discourse
- Learn to develop an original ethnographic research question.
- Learn how to evaluate secondary literature that supports, refutes, or otherwise contributes to your central claim
- Learn to gather original ethnographic data, prepare and analyze it for use in a research paper.
- Learn to use cultural comparison as a tool for understanding how cultural, social, or economic contexts shape understandings and behaviors
- Learn to work collegially as thinkers and cultural critics
- Learn to apply critical, analytical, and evaluative thinking to one’s own writing, through drafting, revising, and/or editing processes appropriate to the discipline in which they are working.
- Understand and learn to use these key terms in linguistic anthropology
 - Religion
 - Indexicality/performance
 - reflexivity
 - media
 - identity
 - code
 - register

Assessment:

In-class essays	10%	
Midterm	20%	
Class participation (including paper comments)	10%	
Proposal	15%	
First draft	15%	
Bibliographic essay and Power Point		15%
Final Draft	15%	

General expectations:

Students must attend all classes. If you must be absent for a medical reason or family emergency, you must provide written documentation.

Rules of academic integrity must be followed.

Papers will be evaluated for strength and originality of your claim, the way in which your data supports the claim, the way in which your claim relates to (e.g. supporting or refuting) other claims in the literature, the coherence of the paper as a whole, and the validity of the findings.

Papers should use the APA style. I strongly recommend that you use citation software such as Refworks (supported by GW) or Endnote.

In your final papers, you must have an argument. Please consult the Turabian chapters on formulating a research problem when writing a research paper.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I personally support the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: "Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information." For the remainder of the code, see:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER (UCC) 202-994-5300

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
- confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals

<http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>

SECURITY

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.