LING 50: Language in the USA

SPRING 2013 Dr. Paul Roberge MW 2:00 - 3:15 PM

This seminar examines the diverse linguistic landscape of the United States, as it has taken shape since the spread of the English language to North America — with concomitant disruption of an indigenous linguistic ecology—and following successive waves of immigration and settlement. We shall dissect a number of “myths” about American English and language in general, such as “Everyone has an accent except me,” “They speak really bad English down South and in New York City,” “In the Appalachians, they speak like Shakespeare.” We shall seek to arrive at an understanding of language diversity in the United States through an examination of regional, ethnic, and social varieties of American English. We shall also take up such issues as subordination and discrimination based on language and dialect differences, nativism and the English-only backlash, and the maintenance of nonmainstream varieties despite stigmatization and the homogenizing pressures exerted by the education system and by our mass-communication culture.