

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, & COMMUNICATION IN THE HIP-HOP NATION

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Content:

Description	1
Objectives	2
Units	2
General information	3
Assignments, grading strategy, composition of grade	4
Attendance	5
Instructions for groupwork and papers	5
Reading	7
Program/Schedule	9
Consent form (sign both parts and return)	14
Appendix: Learning outcomes	

DESCRIPTION

The “Hip-Hop-Nation” is a global **community** that is grounded in shared **practices of language use, some of which have African and African-American roots**. Today, while rappers create and perform in many different languages, hip-hop itself has become a universal idiom, the **shared “language” of the global ‘Hip-Hop Nation’**.

What this language consists of, how people communicate in it, how it evolves, and how it makes global community possible are some of the themes that we explore in this course. The course is an investigation of **sociological, cultural, linguistic, communicative, and historical aspects of hip-hop**: we look at roots of the culture in **African-American oral traditions**, its ability to shape new narrative traditions with the ghetto, described as in a first-person shooter game, in its scope. Hip-hop quickly transcended narrow geographical and racial confines to become the idiom of a multi-national, ‘glocal’ community of marginalized youth, especially the thinking part of that community. Hip-hop is a new **international culture** which gives center stage to language skills and

verbal communication and allows people to remake their identities by acquiring new idioms of self-expression.

We pay close attention to the “meaning-making machinery” of rap, i.e. the **linguistic rhetorical, poetic, and musical practices** from which citizens of the hip-hop nation fashion messages.

The course offers diverse sets of sounds and songs to listen to and think through. It takes you around the globe and lets you experience rap being made in “strange” places. It lets you probe into messages communicated by rappers and explore how these messages are put together, how they *signify*. The course exposes you to intriguing and often beautiful relationships between language and music and asks you to think about language as music and music as communication. It gives you concepts and methods to make sense of and analyze hip-hop culture as a “revolution” in global communication.

OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the course is to construct an understanding of hip-hop as a phenomenon that is more complex and interesting than other types of music that we can dance to. Hip-hop is a new communication medium, a “discourse institution”, culture, and “language” through which people around the globe connect with one another, exchange messages that are diverse, controversial, sometimes realistic, sometimes illusionary, and often provocative and “real”, and the whole time people are dancing.

Hip-hop is a global “languaculture” (i.e. a culture based in shared ways of using language), a new medium of *oral, embodied* communication for a newly globalized, hi-tech world. It is a shared idiom of the global village.

What it is about hip-hop that gives it this outstanding potential—to become a *global* medium of communication within less than 20 years—is one of the questions motivating the approach to hip-hop in this class.

(Please also read the "Learning outcomes", and do this each time a new unit begins.)

UNITS

(1) INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Hip-hop as popular culture and global language. The nature, objectives, and outcomes of the course; what is expected of you; the kinds of activities you will participate in.

Sample: critical listening to rap.

How rap combines diversity (individuality) with shared forms (a shared “idiom” or “code”).

(2) MEDIA REVOLUTION

We study hip-hop as a revolution in communication: graffiti, break-dancing, rapping, and turntablism (deejaying) all developed through a recycling and transformation of existing, traditional media of communication. By inventing new methods for using old media, hip-hop artists developed a new “language” and culture that became the foundation of an initially local, but increasingly global community, the *Hip-Hop Nation*. Membership in the community is constituted by the ability to use and/or understand these methods. This makes hip-hop an exemplary “languaculture”: other human communities are equally constituted by shared practices and idioms.

(3) PRACTICES AND POETRY

In this core unit of the course we investigate and experiment with the main meaning-making methods used in rap music. We investigate how rappers discover and make use of the “music of language”, i.e., its inherent rhythms and sounds; how rhymes rapidly became more complex under the pressures of competition and how rappers developed individual styles by inventing new rhyming methods. We explore the role of rhythm in music, language, and rap, and learn about rhythm in African culture and social life. Rappers also quickly discovered the “imagery” inherent in language—rhetorical figures such as metaphor that are abundant in every language—and soon began to compete with one another by inventing ever-more intricate metaphors. Rap also involves “speech acts” or “language games”, some of which have deep roots in African-American culture, and we will come to terms with these as well. We also explore and experience what it takes to improvise with language—to *freestyle*—and how freestyling in rap compares to improvisation in traditional forms of poetry, in everyday conversation, and in jazz. Finally, we investigate the core technological practice in hip-hop, *sampling*, i.e. the recycling of pre-recorded music and other sound-bites; we study its musical functions, but mainly focus on sampling as an innovative method of creating *multi-layered messages*.

(4) STYLE: IDENTITY RE-MADE

Hip-hop is not only a medium of communication, but also a powerful set of methods and resources to symbolize aspects of one’s identity—one’s “hood”, “coast”, gender, religion, and numerous other affiliations—and to remake who one is for others. The importance of identity in hip-hop is as paramount in early graffiti writing as it is in contemporary innovative hip-hop scenes around the globe. A particular strength of hip-hop is that it has given marginalized youth ways to put themselves “on the map”, to get recognition, and to initiate overdue processes of cultural exchange, interaction between groups, and social emancipation.

We investigate the different ways in which rappers have responded to important social issues such as poverty and patriarchy, and how they mark their attachments to the “hood”, religious beliefs, leaders, or a civil rights agenda.

(5) GLOBAL LANGUAGE

At the end of the semester we study how hip-hop has become a global culture and medium of communication, how it blends everywhere with local cultural (including musical) traditions and enables young people to address, publicize, and work through their locally specific concerns. Hip-hop is global and local at the same time. This is possible because of its layered structure (for example, the possibility to use diverse samples in a single song) and because contradictory messages can be combined. Hip-hop has also become a means to revive dying languages or to include local languages in popular music, where previously only English was used.

Hip-hop is an ideal representation of the world today: it shows unity in diversity, facilitates universal communication, and keeps reinventing, sustaining and, distributing itself.

GENERAL INFORMATION

University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of the University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Documented Disability Statement

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Academic Dishonesty.

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on an exam or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information, please see: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

Accommodations for religious holidays

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

ASSIGNMENTS, GRADING STRATEGY, COMPOSITION OF GRADE

In the course program below, points for assignments are listed in the third column (**1 point = 1%** of your grade). Assignments are due on the day they are listed; late assignments do not count (exceptions need a doctor's note).

Course grades (grades on your transcript) will be on a plus/minus scale:

A	92.00 up	C+	78.00 – 79.99	F	64.99 and lower
A-	90.00 - 91.99	C	72.00 – 77.99		
B+	88.00 - 89.99	C-	70.00 – 71.99	CR	65.00 and up
B	82.00 – 87.99	D+	68.00 – 69.99	NCR	64.99 and lower
B-	80.00 – 81.99	D	65.00 - 67.99		

Composition of grade:

Quizzes, exercises, hip-hop lyrics:	30%
Paper 1	30%
Paper 2	20%
Final exam	20%

QUIZZES

Four short multiple-choice quizzes about reading assigned for the current and previous class-days; 2.5 pts. each.

EXERCISES

Five in-class group exercises, 2 pts. each: analysis of examples of rap poetry and sounds under aspects of poetic practice (rhythm, rhyme, figures of speech, etc.).

LYRICIST'S CORNER

Four times ten lines of self-written hip-hop poetry, illustrating poetic practices such as phrasing, rhyming, and story-telling. Each entry wins 2.5 points; in-class oral performances can win extra points!

PAPERS

Paper 1 (4 pp., double-spaced, 30 points, due October 20): Poetic practices

In this paper you will demonstrate your understanding of poetic concepts and how they apply to rap. "Poetic concepts" include terms relating to rhythm, rhyme, and figures of speech. (For the purposes of this paper, rhythm is less important.)

- Find a song that is rich in rhymes and metaphors; download the lyrics. (You can download a lot of lyrics from ohhla.com, but you can also find lyrics by simply googling the name of the song and artist combined with 'lyrics'.)
- Copy up to about 20 lines of the lyrics into your paper. Number the lines. Lyrics should be single-spaced and indented.
- Find and classify interesting rhymes in these selected lyrics and describe the overall effect that the rhyming patterns create.
- Find and classify interesting figures of speech in these selected lyrics and describe the overall effect that the rhyming patterns create. – Is there a common theme to these figures of speech, is there a "master metaphor" that governs the song (as in the songs 'Funk and 'Astronomy' that we studied in class)?

Make sure to include the words that you are writing in parentheses, for example: "In line 16, there are several internal rhymes: 'rhyme – time', 'bold – old'"; or "Line 12 contains a metonymy: 'grab the mic' stands for the art of rapping."

Your paper should have a brief introduction in which you explain why you chose this song and brief conclusion in which you give a summary assessment of the quality of the lyrics.

Your paper will be graded according to

- (a) your knowledge of rhyme types and figures of speech (roughly measured by the number of terms that you are able to use),
- (b) whether you apply these terms correctly, and

(c) the quality of writing and organization of your paper.

Paper 2 (4 pp., 20 points, due November 22): Identity and style

The format of this paper is similar to Paper 1, but you will focus on stylistic devices (of musical, linguistic, and symbolic kind) that an artist uses to fabricate a certain identity. This identity can be personal, gender-related, ethnic, religious, or of similar kinds

1. Identify an artist (in some cases perhaps group of artists) who fabricates and foregrounds a certain identity and rhetorical “stance”. What stylistic choices—what *acts of identity*—are being made by the artist to arrive at the chosen identity, and to convey it credibly. Choose the artists for the interest that you have in their messages and/or the particular social, political, linguistic, religious, or educational “mission” they are on.
2. Select sections of song lyrics that are representative of the artists’ messages and mission and analyze the poetic, rhetorical, musical, and other stylistic choices made. How does the artist locate him/herself within society—within society’s *soundscape*. We will spend time discussing style, *styles*, and social and cultural identity-making before Paper 2 is due.
3. You can write about rap artists from outside the U.S. In this case, you should discuss the *hybrid* nature of the work, i.e. how it blends elements from different cultures.
4. Include short sections of lyrics in the text, include the complete text of at least one song in the appendix.

Final (20%, date and location TBA)

The final will give you an opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and competencies that you have acquired in this course by answering multiple-choice questions. Questions will relate to all units of the course and include brief exercises in which you will be asked to analyze a sample of rap lyrics or some other artefact. Instructions for how to study for the final will be given near the end of the semester.

ATTENDANCE

Continuous attendance and participation are essential for your success in this course, as well as for the success of the course. You must submit all written work in person in class on the due date.

PROGRAM

1. Introduction			
Date	Theme	Preparation	Points
8/25	Introduction to the course	get books	

2. Media Revolution

Date	Theme	Preparation	Points
8/30	Graffiti: A revolution in communication		
9/1	Graffiti, breaking, scratching: What they have in common	Questions about <i>Style Wars</i> read: Banes, <i>Breaking</i> Rose, Ch.1, 2 Lyrics 1: roll-call	2.5

3. Practice and Poetry

Date	Theme	Preparation	Points
9/6	Rhythm I	Koch, <i>Making Your Own Days</i> . Ch.1, 2 <i>Book of Rhymes</i> , 1 Quiz 1	2.5
9/8	Rhythm II	Exercise 1	2.0
9/13	Rhyme I	<i>Book of Rhymes</i> , 2 Lyrics 2: play with rhythm	2.5
9/15	Rhyme II	Exercise 2	2
9/20	Metaphor I	<i>Book of Rhymes</i> , 3 Course paper: Metaphor and other figures of speech Lyrics 3: play with rhyme	2.5
9/22	Metaphor II	Exercise 3	2
9/27	Hip-hop speech acts	Lyrics 4: play with metaphor	2.5
9/29	Signifying	<i>Book of Rhymes</i> , 6	

		Jay-Z, <i>Decoded</i> , 235-257	
10/4	Freestyling: Techniques of linguistic improvisation	Streeck, <i>Converse conversation</i> , pp. 5 – 16 Edwards, <i>How to Rap</i> , Chs. 4, 9	
10/6	Freestyle as body practice	Gaunt, Translating double-dutch to hip-hop Quiz 2	2.5
10/11	Film		
10/13	Turntablism and sampling	Schloss, <i>Making Beats</i> , pp.135-144, 145-153 Quiz 3	2.5
10/18	Sampling II	Rose, <i>Black Noise</i> , Ch.3	
10/20	What we have learned so far: Hip-hop methods of meaning-making	Paper 1	30

4. Style: Identities Re-Made

Date	Theme	Preparation	Points
10/25	Styles and genres	Coupland, from <i>Style</i> Course paper: On beats and individuality	
10/27	Style: Acts of identity	Exercise 4	2
11/1	Sex	Rose, <i>Black Noise</i> , Ch.5	2.5

11/3	Religion	Quiz 4 Floyd-Thomas, A jihad of words	
11/8	Gangsta rap	Exercise 5	2
11/10	Knowledge and place	Rose, Ch. 4, pp.106-110, 115-124	
11/15	Film		

5. Global language

Date	Theme	Preparation	Points
11/17	Hip-hop hybridity		
11/22	Hip-hop as a global language; what is "glocalization"?	Pennycook & Mitchell, Hip-hop as dustyfoot philosophy Richardson, <i>Hip-Hop Literacies</i> , Ch.3 Paper 2	20
11/29	The Hip-Hop Nation: How real is it?	Group-work	
12/1	Into the future		
TBA	Final		20

Paper 1 due 10/20 in class; Paper 2 due 11/22 in class; Final during finals period



Informed Consent

The course "Language, Culture and Communication in the Hip-Hop Nation" (CMS 367-, Summer 2009) deals in part with the language(s) used in hip-hop. Many words, expressions, and statements used or made by hip-hop artists are considered offensive (obscene, racist, misogynist) by mainstream society. It is clear to me that the use of these words and expressions or the quoting of statements in the context of research and college classes does not constitute an endorsement of their use in other contexts and that it is not possible to analyze and evaluate the use of language in hip-hop without uttering questionable words, including the "N-word" and the "F-word".

I am comfortable attending a course that includes "explicit lyrics", without censoring them. Should I not be comfortable with this policy, I will consult with the instructor, Prof. Streeck, to make special arrangements.

Name:
UT EID:

Signature:
Date:

Total Participation Agreement (no use of electronic devices)

I haven chosen to take this course understanding that it requires my full attention and mental participation and that I will not be permitted to use a laptop, cellphone, or other electronic device during class. I am aware that I will be asked to leave class for the day if I do not comply with this agreement.

Signature: