This course explores the workings of the world’s ethnopoetry, that is, its measured and allusive language existing outside the boundaries of literary canons. We sample widely in a domain sometimes called oral literature, oral poetry or orature, referencing a plethora of speech play and verbal art traditions. We seek to appreciate the mastery exhibited by wordsmiths operating in a variety of settings, from the conversational to the commemorative. Central to our inquiry are key issues surrounding the concept of the text – the relationship between a text and its source performance, as well as the best procedures for creating and presenting texts.

There are three content units: theories and approaches, ethnopoetic varieties, and doing ethnopoetics. One book is assigned for each unit, and for each week I will ask you to read an article or two. Additional readings are listed for your reading pleasure. I have sought to sample both the foundational literature and its contemporary extensions. The presence of several titles by John McDowell (that’s me, folks!) is (I hope) less a testimonial to my colossal ego than a chance to share with you field materials and the process of working them into publication.

Students are expected to play an active role in class discussions, which presupposes careful attention to assigned readings and some dabbling in the suggested list. There will be three short essays (3-5 pages), one for each unit in the class, a final paper of 15 pages (which may build upon the essays), plus opportunities to share your findings with the class.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

I theories and approaches


Session 1 (January 11)


Session 2 (January 18)
Speech is music. George List, “The boundaries of speech and song,” Ethnomusicology 7


Session 3  (January 25)


Session 4  (February 1)


Session 5  (February 8)

II  **ethnopoetic varieties**


**Session 6**  (February 15)


**Session 7**  (February 22)


**Session 8**  (March 1)


Additional readings: Roger Abrahams, “Introductory remarks toward a rhetorical theory of

**Session 9** (March 8)


**Session 10** (March 22)


**Session 11** (March 29)


III doing ethnopoetics

Session 12 (April 5)


Session 13 (April 12)

Additional readings: Peter Seitel, *See So that We May See: Performances and Interpretations of Traditional Tales from Tanzania* (Indiana, 1980); Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Pennsylvania, 1983); Larry Evers and Felipe Molina, *Yáqui Deer Songs* (Arizona, 1987).

Session 14 (April 19)

Additional readings: Karl Kroeber (ed.), *Traditional American Indian Literatures: Texts and Interpretations* (Nebraska, 1981); Ellen Basso (ed.), *Native Latin American Cultures through their Discourse* (Folklore Institute, 1990); Brian Swann (ed.), *On the Translation of Native American Texts* (Smithsonian, 1992).

Session 15 (April 26)