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# LANGUAGES & CULTURES OF THE WORLD

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

FALL 2015 · MW 12:30-1:45 · GRAHAM CENTER 276 · LINGUISTICS 4640

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00-12:00

## **Course Description, Course Objectives, & Global Learning Objectives**

### Description:

Languages of the World is designed for two audiences: 1) for students interested in Linguistics, including those in FIU's 4 + 1 program, I want to provide background information about the broad range of language phenomena found across the world, in addition to a review of the wealth of information about the major language families and the distribution of major and minor language groups; 2) for all other students (who are, presumably, not as oriented to the detail of linguistic analysis as are those in 4 + 1 or those with a prior background in Linguistics), I want to bring into your awareness specific features of the often overlooked medium of the socio/economic/cultural group/ region/ nation/ area that may be of disciplinary interest to you, namely the language(s) of that group/ region/ nation/ area. For both audiences, I want to provide an interdisciplinary context for the broadest possible engagement with the languages and cultures of the world.

### Course Objectives:

- First, an understanding of language as a cognitive / biological / sociocultural resource that is interwoven with every aspect of the human condition; i.e., an understanding of the “language loop”
- An understanding of the ways in which related language varieties are grouped together as “families,” and other ways of grouping languages; i.e., systems of classification
- An understanding of the history and spread of the language families of the world, beginning with the likely advent of human language in East Africa;
- An understanding of the ways in which religion, writing, and language are deeply imbricated
- A grasp of the present-day distribution of language families;
- Familiarity with various writing systems of the world
- A preliminary understanding of the effect of economics on language, and language on economies, both symbolic and “real”
- An appreciation of the complexities of language death, the struggles (personal, political, economic) for language maintenance

These objectives serve the overall goal of providing for you the widest possible context in which to situate further linguistic, historical, cultural, and / or political investigations into any particular group of people / region / nation / geographic area. Thus, this course is introductory in the sense that it is intended to offer a foundation for more advanced work in a variety of disciplines. At the same time, it is not intended as an introduction to linguistics, as such.

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### Global Learning Outcomes

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the interrelatedness of the language families of the world, that these families, while grouped based on linguistic similarity, are complicated by contact among speakers of languages from different genetic groupings, and that this contact is occasioned by conditions that are non-linguistic in nature (i.e., historical, cultural, political).
- Students will be able to conduct an analysis of a range of geo-political problems related to language (e.g. struggles for statehood, linguistic minority rights, etc.) from multiple perspectives, including the perspective of governments, linguistics, minority group leaders, NGOs, etc.
- Students will demonstrate a willingness to develop critical responses to sociocultural problems related to language diversity, with an emphasis on solutions for the maintenance of immigrant languages (locally), and ethnic-minority languages (nationally and internationally).

### **METHOD OF INSTRUCTION**

#### Team-based learning

This semester, our course will be conducted through “team-based learning,” a transformative instructional strategy in which 5-7 students collaborate in high-performance teams that work together throughout the semester.

Please visit [www.teambasedlearning.org](http://www.teambasedlearning.org) outside of class, and watch the three short videos provided under ‘What do TBL Students say?’

#### *Professor’s Perspective on this Course:*

“College is an opportunity to stand outside the world for a few years, between the orthodoxy of your family and the exigencies of career, and contemplate things from a distance... Learning how to think is only the beginning, though. There’s something in particular you need to think about: building a self. The notion may sound strange. ‘We’ve taught them,’ David Foster Wallace once said, ‘that a self is something you just have.’ But it is only through the act of establishing communication between the mind and the heart, the mind and experience, that you become an individual, a unique being—a soul. The job of college is to assist you to begin to do that. Books, ideas, works of art and thought, the pressure of the minds around you that are looking for their own answers in their own ways... college is not the only chance to learn to think, but it is the best. One thing is certain: If you haven’t started by the time you finish your B.A., there’s little likelihood you’ll do it later. That is why an undergraduate experience devoted exclusively to career preparation is four years largely wasted.” -William Deresiewicz, 2014

#### **Reading**

Chapters from Tetel Andresen and Carter’s (forthcoming) *Languages in the World: How History, Culture, and Politics Shape Language* will be provided via the course Blackboard site. Exercises from this text will also be provided.

#### **Assignments**

Homework Exercises	8%
Global Learning Roundtable	2%
Midterm Self and Peer Assessment	5%
Midterm Exam	15%
Team-Based Presentations, (4)	10%
Individual Paper: Sociopolitical issue	10%

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Non-Indo-European Language Journal	10%
Team-Based Final Project	40%

After the first two weeks of the term, I reserve the right to change the grading scheme to include daily reading quizzes. In the event this occurs, one percentage point will be reallocated from each of the 8 categories currently listed above; quizzes will thus constitute 8% of the course grade.

### **Description of Assignments**

Homework Exercises: Will be assigned on a weekly basis.

Short Paper, Sociopolitical Focus: This paper will ask you to examine the way language is involved in the geopolitical or sociopolitical issue of your choice. You may focus on language policy, language rights, language revitalization, multilingual language planning, geopolitical conflict involving language, etc. Possible paper topics include Tibetan language preservation in contemporary China, the revitalization of Hawaiian, Estonia's policy toward the use of Russian, or questions of nationalism around Serbo-Croatian. A good way to find a topic is to read the news, particularly *The New York Times*, which regularly covers geopolitics and language-related issues. Your paper should be on the order of 5-7 pages, no more than ten.

Self and Peer Assessment: Once during the semester, students will assess themselves and their teammates using a rubric provided by the professor.

Tuesday-Times Roundtable: Students are required to attend one meeting of the Global Learning Tuesday-Times Roundtable. See [goglobal.fiu.edu](http://goglobal.fiu.edu) for more information and schedule.

Non-Indo-European Language Journal: During the course of the semester,

Final Project: The loss of the world's languages is accelerating at an unprecedented pace. Ethnic-minority languages spoken by relatively small populations are considered endangered by linguists, (e.g. Chulym language in Russia) but relatively robust national languages that until very recently were considered "healthy" (e.g. Swedish) are now also considered vulnerable. The conditions leading to the endangerment of world languages are related to those leading to the attrition of minority languages in the U.S. (e.g. the cross-generational loss of Spanish in Miami). Students will be asked to work in teams to think critically about the problem of language endangerment and attrition at the local level, addressing either: a) the endangerment of a local indigenous language (e.g. Mikasuki) or b) the attrition of a minority language in Miami-Dade (e.g. Spanish, Kreyòl, etc.). Students will work in teams throughout the semester to:

1. identify a problem
2. document the problem
3. problem solve and, finally,
4. make a local intervention

The heart of the assignment is meaningful engagement with problem solving strategies and the implementation of an intervention. Examples of interventions: the use of technology (e.g. smart phone apps) to promote the use of an indigenous language, a presentation at a local school to teach strategies for maintaining Kreyòl, or an FIU campus initiative, with specific strategies, for promoting the use of Spanish across the student body. Students will submit a final report that documents the selected problem and the intervention they make.

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Date	Topic, Reading, Assignments
25 August	Introduction to course (Team-Based Learning, What do you know, Global Learning, Goals and Objectives, Miami as a Global City) June Jordan “Nobody mean more to me than you and the future life of Willie Jordan” Overview of Language Families of the World
27 August	Overview of Language Families of the World <b>Read:</b> Getting Started: All Languages Were Once Spanglish
1 September	Labor Day – University Closed
3, 8, 10 September	<i>The Language Loop: Language, Body, Cognition, and Culture</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter One: “Embodied Brains, Embedded Bodies”  Team-Based Presentation: Language Loop
<b>POWER</b>	
15, 17 September	<i>The Nation-State</i> <b>Read:</b> a) Introduction to Part I on Power, b) Chapter Two: “The Effects of the Nation-State, or Why there is no Kurdistan”  September 17: Instructor at Conference, No Class Language Map #6 Due
22, 24 September	<i>Writing Systems and Religion</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter Three: “The Development of Writing Systems in the Litmus of Religion and Politics”  Team-Based Presentation: Writing Systems Language Map #2 Due
29 September, 1 October	<i>The Law</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter Four: “Language Planning and Language Law: Who Shapes the Right to Speak”  Team-Based Presentations: Language Policy Language Map #4 Due
6 October	Veterans Holiday – University Closed
8 October	Midterm Exam – In class
<b>MOVEMENT</b>	
13, 15 October	<i>Language Families I</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter 5: “A Mobil History: Mapping Language Stocks and Families”  Team-Based Presentation: Language Families
20 October 22 October	<i>Language Families II</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter 6: “Colonial Consequences: Language Families Remapped”  Team-Based Presentation: Colonialism Language Map #5 Due

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27 October 29 October	<i>Language, Movement, and Geopolitical Conflict</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter 7: “Postcolonial Complications: Violent Outbursts”  Team-Based Presentation: Violence Language Map #3 Due
<b>TIME</b>	
3, 5 November	<i>Human Evolution, Language Evolution</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter 8: “The Remote Past: When Languages Become Embodied”  Team-Based Presentation: Evolution Language Map #1 Due
10 November 12 November	<i>Written Records</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter 9: “The Recorded Past: ‘Catching up to Conditions’ Made Visible”  Team-Based Presentation: Language Change Language Map #7 Due
17, 19 & 24, 26 November	<i>The Future</i> <b>Read:</b> Chapter 10: “The Imagined Future: The Fate of Endangered Languages”  Screenings: <i>The Linguists, First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee</i>  Team-Based Presentation: Economics, Endangerment, Revitalization
1, 3 December	Team-Based Presentations on Final Projects
8 December	Final Project Reports Due Tentatively Scheduled for 8 Dec 5:00-7:00

**Description of Language Map Assignments:**

1. Africa: Use different colors for the five language families (Nilo-Saharan, Niger- Congo, Khoisan, Austronesian, Afro-Asiatic). Include at least six languages for all language families, except Austronesian. Indicate, roughly, where the following languages are spoken: Arabic, Hausa, Swahili, Yoruba, Zulu, Nama, French, English, and Portuguese.
2. Distribution of Arabic: Please sketch a map of the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa

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- and the Mideast. Label each country and the variety of Arabic spoken there (e.g., Egyptian Arabic; Lebanese Arabic, etc.).
3. South Asia: This map should include the countries of Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Start by drawing a line dividing the Dravidian-speaking regions from the Indo-European-speaking regions. Please label these languages, and any others that you would like to include: Sinhala [Sinhalese], Malayalam, Tamil, Gujarati, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, Punjabi, and Oriya.
  4. China: Please label the distribution of Mandarin, Wu [Shanghainese], Hakka, Cantonese, Min, Xiang, Tibetan, Uyghur [Yugur], Mongolian, Tajik. Use a different color for each language family. Feel free to label English in Hong Kong and Portuguese in Macao, if you wish.
  5. Southeast Asia: In different colors, label the languages of the Tai-Kadai, Sino-Tibetan (mainly Hmong-Mien branch), and Austroasiatic language families.
  6. Europe: Using different colors, identify at least one language for all the living branches of Indo-European located in Europe. For some of the branches, you should identify more than one, as follows: 4 Celtic languages, 6 Italic languages, 10 Slavic languages, and 5 Germanic languages. For the Uralic family, identify at least Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian. [28 Mar]
  7. Caucasus: Use different colors to label languages by family (e.g. Caucasian, Indo-European, Altaic). [4 Apr]
  8. North America: Please locate these languages that follow. Use a different color to indicate if they are “healthy,” “moderately healthy,” “moribund,” or “extinct.” Languages: Cherokee, Mayan [family], Nahuatl, Yurok, Chickasaw, Navajo, Apache, Shawnee, Algonquian, Massachusetts, Ojibwe, Cree, Cheyenne, Tuscarora, Mohawk, Paiute, Hopi, Shoshone. [11 Apr]