

Introduction to American Indigenous Languages

Draft for Spring quarter 2008/09

Instructor:

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Description:

This course introduces students to the study of American indigenous languages. The course is organized around a detailed exploration of four language families and the people who speak the languages: the Mayan language family (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize), the Tupí-Guaraní language family (Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, French Guiana), the Quechua language family (Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina) and the Uto-Aztecan language family (Mexico, USA). For each of these language families, we study their history and the history of the people who speak the languages. We explore the socio-political status of the currently spoken languages, linguistic properties of these languages that are markedly different from linguistic properties of European languages like English, and the written and oral traditions of the speakers of the languages. At the end of the course we address the relation between language and culture, in particular, the question of whether the language we speak affects the way we think.

Prerequisites: None.

Readings selected from the following books (and others):

- Campbell, Lyle (1997): *American Indian Languages: The Historical Linguistics of Native America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grenoble, Lenore A. and Lindsay J. Whaley (2006): *Saving Languages. An introduction to language revitalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hinton, Leanne and Ken Hale (eds) (2001): *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, New York: Academic Press.
- Silver, Shirley and Wick R. Miller (1997): *American Indian Languages*, Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press.
- Suárez, Jorge A (1983): *The Mesoamerican Indian Languages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Overview of Weekly Topics and Readings:

INTRODUCTION

- **Week 1:** Language families in the Americas; history of indigenous settlement in the Americas; language versus dialect; evidence for a 'language family'.
- **Week 2:** Socio-political status of languages; language and identity; bi- and multi-lingualism; language endangerment, maintenance and revitalization.

THE MAYAN LANGUAGE FAMILY: Mexico, Guatemala, Belize

- **Week 3:** History of Mayan language family and culture; Mayan (cardinal) spatial orientation system; Mayan counting system.
- **Week 4:** Mayan hieroglyphic writing system; linguistic properties of Mayan languages (phonetic inventory, classifiers, free word order).

THE TUPÍ-GUARANÍ LANGUAGE FAMILY: Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, French Guiana

- **Week 5:** History of Tupí-Guaraní language family and culture; socio-political status of Paraguayan Guaraní; language attitudes in Paraguay.
- **Week 6:** Linguistic properties of Tupí-Guaraní languages (inclusive/exclusive number marking, postpositions, question markers); Tupí-Guaraní plant and animal names.

THE QUECHUAN LANGUAGE FAMILY: Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina

- **Week 7:** History of the Quechua language family and Inca culture; spoken languages; numerical accounting (quipu strings).
- **Week 8:** Linguistic properties of Quechua languages (bipersonal conjugation, agglutinative language, polysynthesis, evidentials).

THE UTO-AZTECAN LANGUAGE FAMILY: Mexico, USA

- **Week 9:** History of Uto-Aztecan language family and (especially Aztec) culture; Aztec counting system; Aztec writing system (pictographs); linguistic properties of Aztec languages (honorification, verbal classification).

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- **Week 10:** Linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis).

Assessment:

weekly assignments (8 × 6%)	48%
midterm	20%
final	20%
participation	12%

Special needs:

Student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs and to discuss potential accommodations. I rely on the Office of Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. I encourage you to contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Academic misconduct:

I expect all the work you do in this course to be your own, unless collaboration is explicitly requested for a particular task. While you are encouraged to discuss assignments with each other, the final write-up has to be done individually. Academic dishonesty will not be allowed under any circumstances. Any case of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the university committee on academic misconduct, and will be handled according to academic policy.