

Ling 307 (Introduction to American Indigenous Languages)

TR 1:30-3:18pm, Jennings 160

Instructor:

Judith Tonhauser, 212 Oxley
Office hours: *tbd* and by appointment

Office phone: (614) 292-7849
Email: *judith@ling.osu.edu*
Mailbox: Oxley 225

Credit hours: 5

Prerequisites: Eng110

GECs: Social sciences: individuals and groups; Diversity: international issues (western (non-United States))

Expected learning outcomes for GEC Social Sciences: Individuals and groups, and how this course addresses these goals

1. Students understand the theories and methods of social scientific inquiry as they are applied to the studies of individuals, groups, organizations, and societies.

This course explores topics concerning indigenous languages of the Americas that cover a variety of areas of the study of language, such as phonetics, syntax, sociolinguistics and language policies. For each topic, the course identifies the kind of data used, the methods used for analyzing the data and linguistic theories developed on the basis of such data. The course places an emphasis on cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison. One topic, for example, that will be investigated across different cultures and languages is bilingual education: what is the attitude of different groups of people to bilingual education, and how is this affected by the policies of the country these people live in? The scientific methods employed to explore these topics range from quantitative studies and questionnaires to the study of government texts and data from the languages studied during the course.

2. Students understand the behavior of individuals, differences and similarities in the contexts of human existence (e.g., psychological, social, cultural, economic, geographic, and political), and the processes by which groups, organizations, and societies function.

The subject matter of this course concerns indigenous languages of the Americas, and language is a fundamentally human phenomenon that shapes and the behavior and cognition of individuals but also contributes to how groups of individuals and societies interact among themselves, how they distinguish themselves from speakers of other languages or dialects, and how they interact with such other groups. Linguistics 307 provides opportunity for students to study both of these aspects of language. For example, a comparison of how different languages mark temporal information provides insight into how languages differ in expressing an individual's experience of the actual world, and how different languages force their speakers to verbally encode different things about their environment. Students learn about the importance of language in culture, communication and socio-political topics of current relevance.

3. Students develop abilities to comprehend and assess individual and social values, and recognize their importance in social problem solving and policy making.

Language use reflects social norms and values. This course covers topics that deal with how language affects society and how society affects language. We will study, for example, why certain indigenous communities resist raising their children in the indigenous language, despite efforts by the government to encourage bilingual education. Students learn to consider different perspectives on a topic, in order to better understand how the values of individuals as well as those of groups can affect policy making and personal decisions.

Expected learning outcome for GEC Diversity: International issues (western (non-United States)) and how this course addresses these goals

1. Students exhibit an understanding of political, economic, cultural, physical, and social differences among the nations of the world, including a specific examination of non-Western culture.

Topics covered in the class include linguistic properties of indigenous languages of the Americas, the history of settlement of speakers of such languages, and the socio-political situation of the speakers. Language is intimately tied to human cognition and social identity. By examining linguistic properties such as word order, tense, and focus in indigenous and European languages, students learn about the diversity of language as well as the fundamental properties common to all human languages, and how linguistic similarities and differences relate to human cognition. The discussion of the history of human settlement in the Americas, and the movements of particular indigenous peoples over time, will provide insight into current political and social questions in the Americas, as well as the social situation of speakers of indigenous languages. The course approaches the question of the socio-political situation of speakers of such languages by examining attitudes of particular communities towards the indigenous languages, and government policies on bilingual education and linguistic rights. The readings were chosen so as to facilitate a comparison of these languages and cultures with each other, but also with European ones. This helps students understand how linguistic and cultural differences contribute to socio-political matters of current relevance, including bilingual education, linguistic diversity and language death, and language policy.

Course objectives:

Millions of people in the Americas (the part of the world that encompasses North, Central and South America) speak languages other than the well-known European ones (e.g. English, Spanish, Portuguese). The goal of this course is to introduce you to several of the many thousand indigenous languages spoken in the Americas, and for you to come to an understanding of the history of particular language families of the Americas, to explore the socio-political situation of the people who speak such languages, and to study some of the linguistic features that distinguish these languages from the better-known European languages. The course is organized around three language families: the Tupí-Guaraní language family (Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, French Guiana), the Mayan language family (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize) and the Athapaskan language family (USA, Canada). For each of these language families, we'll explore the history of settlement of speakers of languages in the family, and then focus on particular languages within the language family to study questions such as: How do these languages differ from e.g. English?, How are these languages written? What are the speakers' attitudes about indigenous languages compared to the European languages? What is the legal situation in a particular country for speakers of indigenous languages? Are these languages taught in schools, and if not, why? By examining indigenous languages of the Americas, the course also serves as an introduction to the scientific study of language (including phonetics, writing systems, morphology, syntax, sociolinguistics, language acquisition), with the goal of helping you think about human language in a more informed way, giving you a taste of its relevance to current intellectual and social issues, and developing your ability to critically evaluate and compare information across cultures and countries.

Student learning outcomes:

By the end of this course:

1. Students have developed an understanding of linguistic properties of indigenous languages spoken in the Americas, as well as the history and socio-political status of their speakers.
2. Students are able to think in an informed way about human language and assess its relevance to current intellectual and social issues.
3. Students are able to critically evaluate and compare information across cultures and countries.

Readings: A course package will be compiled that includes the readings for the course (see topical outline of class meetings).

Evaluation: Letter grades (A-E) are used for students' evaluation:

points	letter grade	points	letter grade	points	letter grade
93 - 100	A	80 - 82.9	B-	67 - 69.9	D+
90 - 92.9	A-	77 - 79.9	C+	60 - 66.9	D
87 - 89.9	B+	73 - 76.9	C	below 60	E
83 - 86.9	B	70-72.9	C-		

Evaluation breaks down into four parts:

Reactions to readings	25%
Take-home midterm	30%
Participation	10%
Final project	35%
	100%

Reactions to readings: Reading assignments are due the day for which they are assigned, and we will discuss the readings during that class meeting. On the evening before a class meeting for which a reading is assigned, you will send me (via email) a reaction to the readings (before 7pm). This reaction can be

- a comment about the reading material you would like to raise during our discussion of it,
- a question about the reading that you would like to see clarified during the class meeting (cf. my comment on participation below), or
- an answer to a question I pose about the readings.

Additional details concerning the format of these reactions will be provided in class.

Midterm: The objective of the take-home midterm is to assess your understanding of the topics and techniques covered so far. The midterm will consist of 3-5 essay questions that will require you to draw on what we have discussed in the course to answer questions about linguistic properties of American indigenous languages or the socio-political status and history of their speakers. The midterm questions are handed out at the end of class 10 and are due in class 11.

Participation: Sophisticated participants in scholarly discourse display a critical stance and the willingness to struggle with hard concepts, as evidenced by clear, carefully aimed questions and comments. The art of formulating well-developed questions is also one of the keys to successful research. This is the opportunity

to begin to practice. To earn full participation credit,

- (i) you are consistently attentive in class and complete your classwork thoroughly and thoughtfully,
- (ii) you participate actively in class discussions, making thoughtful and relevant comments without monopolizing class time, and
- (iii) you listen respectfully to peers' contributions and respond appropriately.

Final project: Your final project for this course is a **comparative** study of a topic pertaining to indigenous languages of the Americas. You could, for instance, compare

- the word order properties of two (or more) indigenous languages,
- bilingual education policies in two (or more) countries,
- the writing systems of two (or more) indigenous languages,
- the history of settlement of two (or more) indigenous peoples, etc.

You are welcome to propose a topic but I am also happy to help you identify a suitable one. At least one of the languages, indigenous groups or countries you discuss must be one that is not covered in class. I will help you identify suitable resources for your project. To help you develop your project in a timely manner, you will be required to (i) identify a potential topic by class 13 (one paragraph topic description) and (ii) hand in a draft of your paper by class 18. The final project (about 14-16 pages) is due during exam week on the day determined by the Master schedule.

Course policies:

1. I encourage you to come my office hours (or make an appointment) to discuss questions about the course material. I hope we'll get to know each other as the course proceeds!
2. Come to class prepared. Reading assignments are due the day for which they are assigned.
3. If you have a cell phone, please make sure it never rings during class. If I see you reading or writing text messages during class, this will affect your participation grade negatively.
4. If you have to come late to a class meeting or leave early, please let me know ahead of time, and sit near the door.
5. We will at times have discussions that venture onto controversial ground. Listen and respond respectfully to others that might have opinions and experiences that differ from yours.
6. I will often not teach directly from the assigned readings. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out **from one of your class mates** about the material we covered. Handouts will not be sent out via email but can be retrieved from the course mail box in Oxley, room 225. Exceptions are made only for documented (e.g. medical) emergencies.

Approximate class schedule: (20 class meetings)

Class 1 What is a language family? Language families in the Americas, history of indigenous settlement in the Americas; Reading: Campbell (1997:chapter 1), Bright (1984)

Class 2 Introduction to linguistic sub-disciplines, linguistic competence, language variation
Reading: Hinton (2001b), Ash et al. (2001:25-28)

End of week 1: Reactions completed for class 2 readings

The Mayan Language Family

Class 3 Introduction to the Mayan language family, history of settlement, currently spoken languages and speakers, literacy; Reading: Richards and Richards (1996)

Class 4 Phonetics and the writing system of Jacaltec
Reading: Bergmann et al. (2007:2.0-2.3), Craig (1979:3-19)

End of week 2: Reactions completed for class 3 and 4 readings

Class 5 Phonetics and writing system continued

Class 6 Mayan syntax I: word order, argument marking; Reading: Craig (1979:19-34)

End of week 3: Reactions completed for class 6 readings

Class 7 Mayan syntax continued'

Class 8 Mayan syntax II: directionals, classifiers; Reading: Craig (1979:34-51)

End of week 4: Reactions completed for class 8 readings

Class 9 Language policy and language rights in Guatemala; Reading: Maxwell (2004)

The Tupí-Guaraní Language Family

Class 10 Introduction to the Tupi-Guarani language family, history of settlement, currently spoken languages and speakers; Reading: López (1996), Jensen (1999)

End of week 5: Reactions completed for class 8 and 9 readings, midterm handed out (class 10)

Class 11 Linguistic features of Paraguayan Guaraní (word order, argument marking)

Class 12 Linguistic features of Paraguayan Guaraní continued (tense and aspect)

End of week 6: midterm due (class 11)

Class 13 Language acquisition and attitudes about Guaraní; Reading: Choi (2003)

Class 14 Paraguay: A bilingual country?; Reading: Choi (2005)

End of week 7: Reactions completed for class 13 and 14 readings, one paragraph paper topic due

Class 15 Language policy in Paraguay, Ecuador and Mexico; Reading: Baldauf and Kaplan (2007)

The Athapaskan Language Family

Class 16 Introduction to the Athapaskan language family, history of settlement, currently spoken languages and speakers; Reading: Bach (2003)

End of week 8: Reactions completed for class 15 and 16 readings

Class 17 Linguistic features of Athapaskan languages (argument marking, word order)
Reading: Jung (2000); Thompson (2000)

Class 18 Language policy in the USA, The Native American Languages Act
Reading: Hinton (2001a); Arnold (2001)

End of week 9: Reactions completed for class 17 and 18 readings, draft of final paper due

Class 19 Bilingual Navajo education; Reading: Arviso and Holm (2001)

Wrap-up: Indigenous languages across the globe: Past, present and future

Class 20 Reading: Harrison (2007:chapter 1)

End of week 10: Reactions completed for class 19 and 20 readings

Final paper due by the date determined by the Master schedule

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. 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.

Special needs:

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

References

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