Endangered Languages & Language Documentation 2020-21

Guided Research seminar
LASC10111/11163/11165

Seminar leader:	Laura Arnold	laura-arnold.org
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Office hour (online):	Tuesdays, 10.00 BST/GMT	
	Collaborate classroom	
Collaborate meeting:	Weekly, time tbc	
	Collaborate classroom	
Informal drop-in session:	Every second Monday (starting Week 2), 13.10-14.00	
	McEwan Hall, Foyer 5	
Live welcome session:	Friday 25 Sept, 16.00 BST	
	Collaborate classroom	

1 Aims and outcomes

Language endangerment is one of the most pressing issues in linguistics today: thousands of the world's minority languages are under threat, as speakers shift to regional and national languages of social, economic, and educational prestige. In this course, we will explore the consequences of this situation for speakers of these languages, the discipline of linguistics, and the global community at large. In particular, we will focus on the relationship between language endangerment and the rapidly emerging subfield of language documentation, the aim of which is to create as comprehensive a record as possible of the language and culture of a given speech community. Not only do these documentations serve to create permanent records of local cultural, historical, and biological knowledge; but they also contribute primary linguistic data from little-studied languages for further analysis, regardless of theoretical framework.

This course will be of interest to those planning on doing any kind of linguistic fieldwork, but especially for students planning future projects with endangered languages. By the end of this course, students:

- will have a good understanding of the issues surrounding language endangerment, including the current state of the world's languages, why we should be concerned

about language endangerment and death, and methods for quantifying linguistic vitality;

- will have developed a strong foundation in the history and theory of language documentation, and will understand how documentation is distinct from description, and the value of documentary work;

- will have gained a working knowledge of best-practice procedures in language documentation, including methods, hardware and software, ethics, community engagement, project planning, and funding applications.

2   Practical information

This GR seminar will be delivered online. To be clear, this means that all students will be able to achieve all learning outcomes without any face-to-face activities. While the structure of the seminar will vary from week-to-week, a typical week will look something like this:

- A short welcome video, in which I'll introduce the topics for the week and outline the learning outcomes;

- Some 'mini-lecture' videos, each around 5-15 minutes long, in which I discuss some of the key concepts for the week;

- Some asynchronous discussion and activities on the discussion board (see below for more information);

- Two or three key readings, as well as additional optional readings (see below for more information);

- **Key event**: 1 hour of synchronous discussion on Collaborate once a week, in which we meet as a class to discuss some of the issues from that week (see below for more information);

- A short summary video, in which I review what we've covered for the week, underline key points and lessons learnt, and discuss further directions for research.

Asynchronous discussion (discussion boards)

We will be using the discussion board on Learn. You can access the discussion board by clicking on 'Endangered Languages and Language Documentation Group' on the Learn page, and then on 'Group Discussion Board' in the left-hand sidebar.

The discussion board will be an informal venue, so I also encourage you to read and respond to each others' comments and questions. We will be using the discussion boards in three main ways:

1. **Warm-up questions:** At the beginning of each week, I'll post a couple of questions in the forum for that week, to get you thinking about some of the topics we're going to cover. These questions will be very straightforward, and normally won't require any preparation – in fact, you should complete these questions *before* you look at the key readings for the week. For example, in Week 2, I will ask you to share what you have already heard about language endangerment (for example from the media), and what your motivations were for choosing this course.

   Please respond to the warm-up questions by 5pm BST/GMT on the Monday of each week. I will be active on the discussion board at 9am BST/GMT on the Tuesday, to respond to what you've written.

2. **Activity-based questions:** In some weeks, I will use the discussion board I will ask you to collaborate together on a problem, or share the results of your own investigations. This will require some preparation from you. For example, in Week 2, I will ask you to collaborate to quantify the vitality of several languages, using demographic and sociolinguistic data; and in Week 4, I will ask you to post a short report on a language documentation of your choice.

   Please respond to the activity-based questions before 12pm BST/GMT on the Friday of each week. I will be active on the discussion board at 4pm BST/GMT on Friday, to respond to what you've written.

3. **A space for you!** If you have any questions, follow-up thoughts, or comments on any of the material covered in this seminar, I heartily encourage you to start a new thread in the appropriate week. There will also be forums for each of the assessments, as well as one on the course more generally – please post any questions you have here. Other people are likely to have the same question, so the whole class might benefit from the answer!

Readings

Each week, I will be setting two or three **key readings** – you can find the readings associated with each week below, in the course outline. Most of these should be accessible through the Resource List (on the Learn page), as well as DiscoverEd; if there are any that aren't, I'll make sure there are digital copies available to you. You should complete the key readings for the week *after* you've completed the warm-up questions on the discussion boards, but *before* the synchronous class discussion on Collaborate (see below).

I will also be recommending a few additional **optional readings** each week. The more of these you read, the easier you will find your Assignments (see below for more information). In particular, Assignment 1 will be an annotated bibliography of papers discussing issues relating to the topics covered in Weeks 2-5. You're welcome to use these optional readings as part of Assignment 1.

However, I won't be providing an exhaustive list of optional readings — one of the main learning outcomes from the GR seminars is to prepare you to carry out your own self-directed research. I heartily encourage you to find your own readings, for example by chasing up references in the key or optional readings, or by searching on DiscoverEd, so you can develop your own skills in tracking down appropriate sources.

Synchronous discussion (Collaborate)

The key event of each week will be our meeting, which I'm planning to hold on Collaborate. We will use this time to discuss the set readings for the week. You can access the Collaborate classroom thus: My Groups > Endangered Languages and Language Documentation > Collaborate.

At the time of writing this, we do not yet have a scheduled time for this Collaborate meeting. I will be contacting you all at the beginning of the semester with a Doodle poll, to find the best time for us all to meet. This means that you can avoid clashes with any other courses you might be taking which have timetabled synchronous activities. So keep an eye on your emails, and please respond to the Doodle poll as soon as you're able.

I will try to record all of the Collaborate sessions (with your consent, of course) — so if you can't make one of the discussions for some reason, you can always watch the recording later.

Informal drop-in sessions

While the main content of the course will be delivered online, developing a sense of community is also an important part of the student experience. This will be much easier if you can meet me and your fellow students face-to-face.

Because of this, I have arranged for us to have optional get-togethers once a fortnight: drop-in sessions, where you can come say hi, bring any questions you have from the week's topics, and generally have an informal chat with me and your colleagues about all things language endangerment, documentation, and fieldwork. While you are encouraged to attend if possible, ***no one is obliged to attend these sessions, if you are unable or unwilling*** — no questions asked. If anything comes up during these sessions that

I think the whole class should hear about, I'll send out the information in a summary email.

These drop-in sessions will be held at 13.10-14.00 every second Monday, starting in Week 2 (i.e., Weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10). The venue will be McEwan Hall, Foyer 5, which is large enough for us to meet in a socially-distanced manner.

Office hour

In addition to the drop-in sessions, I will be running an online office hour once a week, on Tuesdays at 10.00 BST/GMT. You can access this through the Collaborate portal on the Learn page. If you're not able to make this time, feel free to send me an email to arrange a meeting.

> *If this all sounds like a lot to take in – don't worry! At the beginning of each week, I will post a detailed schedule for the coming week on Learn. This schedule will include information on what the activities and key readings for the week will be, as well as some of the questions we'll be discussing in the Collaborate session :)*

3   Course outline

Week	Topics	Key readings
1 w/c 21/9	*No class*	
2 w/c 28/9	**Endangered languages: State of the field** – What is language endangerment? – How many of the world's languages are endangered? – Quantifying language vitality	Krauss (1992); Crystal (2000: Chapter 1)

Week	Topics	Key readings
3 w/c 5/10	**Endangered languages: Why should we care?** – What attitudes can be found towards language endangerment? – What are the arguments for and against *studying* endangered languages? – What are the arguments for and against *preserving* endangered languages?	Ladefoged (1992); Dorian (1993); Newman (2003)
4 w/c 12/10	**What is language documentation?** – What is the distinction between language documentation and language description? – What are the aims and procedures of language documentation?	Boas (1917); Himmelmann (1998)
5 w/c 19/10	**Fieldwork with endangered languages** – What is linguistic fieldwork? – What issues do we have to think about when doing fieldwork with endangered languages?	Bowern (2008: Chapter 1); Hyman (2001)
6 w/c 26/10	*Reading week: No class*	
7 w/c 2/11	**Project planning and grant writing** – How do we choose which language(s) we want to work on? – How do we go about writing a grant application to work on an endangered language? – Is linguistic fieldwork always a positive experience?	Bowern (2011); Macaulay (2004)
8 w/c 9/11	**Community contexts** – What ethical issues do we have to think about in the context of fieldwork with endangered languages? – How can we work with language communities in a respectful and empowering way? – How do ethical and engagement issues vary with different communities?	Thieberger & Musgrave (2007); Holton (2009); Dobrin (2008)

Week	Topics	Key readings
9 w/c 16/11	**Practical issues in language documentation** – What hardware and software do we use in language documentation? – What kind of data should we collect? – How do we manage metadata? – What are the procedures for archiving the data?	Bowern (2008: Chapter 2); Margetts & Margetts (2012); Thieberger & Berez (2012)
10 w/c 23/11	**Language maintenance and revitalisation** – In what contexts is it appropriate to work with a community to maintain/revitalise their language? – What are the procedures for maintenance/revitalisation?	Fishman (1991: Chapters 2 & 3); Hinton (2010)
11 w/c 30/11	**Case study: As [asz] – Lessons from fieldwork with a moribund language**	Evans (2001)

4   Assessment

For both undergraduate and postgraduate students, there are two assessments:

Assessment 1: Annotated bibliography

Weighting: Hons/MSc (LASC11163) – 30%; MSc (LASC11165) – 20%

Word limit: 1500 words (+/- 10%).

Deadline: 12 November 2020.

In this assignment, you will read around 10 papers that are related to the topics covered in Weeks 2-5. For each paper, you will write a short summary (∼150 words) for each, in which you summarise the main points, outline the contribution of the paper, and provide a critical assessment. You will choose the papers you read, based on your own interests. While you can use the optional further readings I'll be recommending each week for this assignment, you should not report on any of the papers assigned as key readings. I will be providing further guidance, including recommendations on how to select readings for your bibliography, in Week 3.

Assessment 2: Mock grant proposal

Weighting: Hons/MSc (LASC11163) – 70%; MSc (LASC11165) – 80%

Word limit: Hons/MSc (LASC11163) – 2500 words; MSc (LASC11165) – 4000 words (+/- 10%).

Deadline: 17 December 2020.

For this assignment, you will be asked to choose a language, and write a mock grant proposal for a documentation project on that language. You will be given further guidance on this assignment, including some recommendations for how to choose a language and the kinds of information you should include in your grant proposal, in Week 9.

5   References: Key readings

Boas, Franz. 1917. Introductory. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 1(1): 1-8.

Bowern, Claire. 2008. *Linguistic fieldwork: A practical guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [Chapter 1: Introduction; Chapter 2: Technology in the field]

Bowern, Claire. 2011. Planning a language documentation project. In *The Cambridge handbook of endangered languages*, ed. by Peter Austin and Julia Sallabank, 459-482. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, David. 2000. *Language death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Chapter 1: What is language death?]

Dobrin, Lise M. 2008. From linguistic elicitation to eliciting the linguist: Lessons in community empowerment from Melanesia. *Language* 84(2):300-24.

Dorian, Nancy. 1993. A response to Ladefoged's other view of endangered languages. *Language* 69(3): 575-579.

Evans, Nicholas. 2001. The last speaker is dead – long live the last speaker! In *Linguistic fieldwork*, ed. by Paul Newman and Martha Ratliff, 250-281. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fishman, Joshua. 1991. *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. [Chapter 2: Why try to reverse language shift and is it really possible to do so?; Chapter 3: 'Where' and 'why' does language shift occur and how can it be reversed?]

Himmelmann, Nikolaus. 1998. Documentary and descriptive linguistics. *Linguistics* 36: 161-195.

Hinton, Leanne. 2011. Revitalization of endangered languages. In *The Cambridge handbook of endangered languages*, ed. by Peter Austin and Julia Sallabank, 291-311. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holton, Gary. 2009. Relatively ethical: A comparison of linguistic research paradigms in Alaska and Indonesia. *Language Documentation and Conservation* 3(2):161-75.

Hyman, Larry. 2001. Fieldwork as a state of mind. In *Linguistic fieldwork*, ed. by Paul Newman and Martha Ratliff, 15-33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Krauss, Michael. 1992. The world's languages in crisis. In Ken Hale, Michael Krauss, Lucille J. Watahomigie, Akira Y. Yamamoto, Colette Craig, LaVerne Masayesva Jeanne and Nora C. England. 1992. Endangered Languages. *Language* 68(1):1-42.

Ladefoged, Peter. 1992. Another view of endangered languages. *Language* 68(4): 809-811.

Macaulay, Monica. 2004. Training linguistics students for the realities of fieldwork. *Anthropological Linguistics* 46(2):194-209.

Margetts, Anna and Andrew Margetts. 2012. Audio and video recording techniques for linguistic research. In *The Oxford handbook of linguistic fieldwork*, ed. by Nicholas Thieberger. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Newman, Paul. 2003. The endangered languages issue as a hopeless cause. In *Language death and language maintenance: Theoretical, practical, and descriptive approaches*, ed. by Mark Janse and Sijmen Tol, 1-13. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Thieberger, Nicholas and Andrea L. Berez. 2012. Linguistic data management. In *The Oxford handbook of linguistic fieldwork*, ed. by Nicholas Thieberger. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thieberger, Nick, and Simon Musgrave. 2007. Documentary linguistics and ethical issues. *Language Documentation and Description* 4:26-37.

Woodbury, Anthony C. 2003. Defining documentary linguistics. In *Language Documentation and Description*, Volume 1, ed. by Peter Austin, 33-51. London: Hans Rausing Endangered Language Project.