Linguistic Fieldwork

*Teacher:* What is the highest technique you hope to achieve?

*(character played by) Bruce Lee:* To have no technique.

*from Enter the dragon*

“It will take everything you know about everything.” (paraphrase of advice to Jimmy Kimmel before taking on The Tonight Show)

**Course description**

This class provides a survey of some of the methodological issues involved in doing fieldwork, one of the primary ways in which linguists obtain data. Sources of data in linguistics can be roughly divided into ‘old’ and ‘new’:

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<th>Old data</th>
<th>New data</th>
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<td>method</td>
<td>philology</td>
<td>corpus linguistics</td>
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<td>source</td>
<td>mss. and media,</td>
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<td>published or</td>
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<td>advantage</td>
<td>relatively easy</td>
<td>large amounts of data</td>
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<td></td>
<td>logistics</td>
<td>relatively easy logistics;</td>
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<td>new questions can be</td>
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<td>answered</td>
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<td>disadvantage</td>
<td>closed corpus:</td>
<td>programming skills required</td>
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<td>new questions</td>
<td>to access</td>
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<td>may not be</td>
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<td>answerable</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>must be native speaker/signer</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>logistically difficult</td>
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If fieldwork is time-consuming, expensive and logistically difficult, then why bother with it?

- Theoretical linguistics needs detailed descriptions of languages, and is enriched by knowledge of linguistic diversity.
- By some estimates, ninety per cent of the world's languages may disappear in the next 100 years.
- Fieldwork can be personally satisfying.
Unlike a traditional field methods class, where class participants practice working with a speaker, this is a reading-based class where we discuss: endangered languages; goals of language documentation; ethics and linguists’ responsibilities; field materials; elicitation; texts; grammars; dictionaries; archiving. Whenever possible, weekly reading assignments will contrast different points of view on the same topic.

**Learning goal**

- To prepare students for independent fieldwork on a language of their choosing

**Topics covered**

1. week 2 (Oct 5)  Overview of class; why field methods this way; endangered languages

2. week 3 (Oct 12)  Goals of fieldwork; what fieldwork is like
Reading to discuss: Himmelmann 1998 [Joey, Brent, Nataliya]; Macaulay 2004 (Macaulay 2012) [Sam, Kelliane]; Vaux and Cooper 1999 ch. 1, ‘Introduction’ [Molly, Alec]

3. week 4 (Oct 19)  Field notes and recordings

4. week 5 (Oct 26)  Elicitation (1)
Reading to discuss: Everett 2001

5. Week 6 (Nov 2)  Elicitation (2)
Reading to discuss: Vaux, Cooper, and Tucker 2007 ch. 9, Matthewson 2004

6. week 7 (Nov 9)  Texts
Reading to discuss: Chelliah 2001; Vaux and Cooper 1999 ch. 16

7. week 8 (Nov 16)  Grammars
Reading to discuss: Mosel 2006b, Noonan 2007, Weber 2007
8. week 9 (Nov 23) Dictionaries
Reading to discuss: Frawley, Hill, and Munro 2002; Vaux and Cooper 1999 ch. 3

9. week 10 (Nov 30) Archiving and access; collaboration
Reading to discuss: (archiving) Bird and Simons 2003, Holton 2012; (collaboration) Dwyer 2006

10. week 11 (Dec 7) Language revitalization and linguists’ responsibilities.
Reading to discuss: Wilkins 1992, Newman 1999

Finals week (Dec 15) Final project due

Student assessment

Student grades will be based on:

- weekly participation in class discussion of week’s reading
- final project (below)

Final project options

(1) Write a (real or mock) grant proposal for field research. Your proposal should contain the following sections:

- Cover page (funding agency targeted, title of project, amount of money requested)
- Description of proposed research, including work plan (limit: 12 single-spaced pages, including bibliography)
- Budget and budget justification (3 pages maximum)

You may find useful information in Wittenburg 2003 and/or Austin 2010.
(2) A set of elicitation questions in some language on some linguistic topic of interest to you in this class. These must be very concrete questions, exactly what you would ask your speaker. Minimum 12 questions. You should also explain a little bit about the language and what your goal is.

(3) Design your own course: prepare an annotated bibliography on some subtopic of linguistic fieldwork (minimum 8 references).

(4) An annotated bibliography on some topic in the phonology, morphology or syntax in some language you would like to do field research on with a native speaker/signer (should contain paragraph length synopses of at least 5 references). In general, the longer your bibliography, the better.

(5) Select one of the older (pre-1980) sources on linguistic fieldwork in the extended bibliography at the end of this syllabus under General or Fieldwork in specific geographical areas. Ignoring technology, write a five-page critique explaining which aspects of the methods seem relevant today and which aspects seem out-dated.

**Additional references on linguistic fieldwork**

**General:**


Anthologies: Newman and Ratliff 2001b; Gippert, Himmelman, and Mosel 2006; Thieberger 2012

Articles: Newman 1992

**Typological questionnaire:** Comrie and Smith 1977

**Working with monolingual speakers:** Loving 1975, Everett 2001

**Fieldwork in specific geographical areas:**

Australia: Wurm 1967, Sutton and Walsh 1979; Tsunoda 2005 [focus is worldwide language endangerment issues, but lots of information also provided on fieldwork experiences], Walsh 2007


Pacific Northwest: Watanabe and Sasama 2007

China: Poa and LaPolla 2007

India: Abbi 2001


Amazon: Everett 2003

Africa: Fast 2009, Good 2012

Indonesia: Florey 2008
‘Developing countries and beyond’: Fife 2005


**Memoirs/biographies of linguistic fieldworkers:**
- Bob Dixon: Dixon 1984
- A.G. Morice: Mulhall 1986
- J.P. Harrington: Laird 1975; Walsh 1976
- David Wilkins: Wilkins 1992
- Melville Jacobs: Seaburg and Amoss 2000

All of the contributions to Newman and Ratliff 2001b are autobiographical to a certain extent.

**Fieldwork for specific purposes:**
- Sociolinguistics: Labov 1984, Schilling 2013
- First language acquisition: McDaniel, McKee, and Cairns 1996
- Second language acquisition: Freed 1978
- Semantics: Matthewson 2004

**Anthropological perspectives:** Mead 1939, Lounsbury 1953, Wax 1979, Wengle 1988, Fife 2005

**Speaker perspectives:** McLaughlin and Sall 2001 (part II), Kadanya 2007

**Outdated computational linguistic perspective:** Lawler 1967

**Commercial videos with fieldwork scenes:**
- Linguistic: Brackett and Wilder 1941 [very small amount on linguistic fieldwork]; Kramer et al. 2009
- Ethnomusicological: Venetis, Miller, and Greenwald 2001

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