

Field Methods: Lhasa Tibetan

Course description

This class provides students with a chance to learn about linguistic fieldwork, or documentation of language through work with one or more native speakers. Fieldwork is one of the primary methods by which linguists obtain data for analysis. This quarter we are fortunate to be working with Tsering Yuthok, a native speaker of Lhasa Tibetan.

I divide sources of data in linguistics into roughly two types, ‘existing data’ and ‘new data’, with subtypes:

	Existing data (closed corpus)		New data (open corpus)		
type	philology	corpus linguistics	idiolectal description	socio-, phonetic	fieldwork
primary methods, skills	language study	programming	introspection, linguistic training	observation, elicitation; quantitative	observation, elicitation; qualitative
source	mss. and media, published or unpublished	computer files	linguist’s own language	own or other language	own or other language
advantage	no inter-personal issues	large amounts of data	logistically easy, questions answerable	dealing with people, questions answerable	dealing with people, questions answerable
disadvantage	questions may not be answerable	questions may not be answerable	native linguistic knowledge required	lots of people required, logistic set-up	dealing with people, logistic set-up

Fieldwork is time-consuming, expensive and logistically difficult. So why do we do it?

- Theoretical linguistics needs detailed descriptions of languages, and is enriched by knowledge of linguistic diversity.
- By some estimates (e.g. Krauss 1992), ninety per cent of the world's languages may disappear in the next 100 years.
- Fieldwork can be personally and professionally satisfying.

Learning goals

- To expose students to the goals and practices of modern language documentation
- To prepare students for independent fieldwork

Inspiration

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*)

Note that the “Field Methods in Linguistics” and “Advanced Field Methods in Linguistics” classes tend to be a training ground for graduate students and senior undergraduates about how to do fieldwork and also about ways of collecting and analyzing data from a single informant, usually a graduate student who is a native speaker of a language of interest to the faculty member. Students meet with the consultant one-on-one for about an hour each week, then meet with her/him for 2 one-hour-fifteen minutes class (2 hours and 30 minutes per week) with a faculty member often leading the class. Students write a term paper that describes an aspect of the language they found interesting. Some have gone on to publish their term papers in refereed journals. I always emphasize that “Field Methods in Linguistics” and “Advanced Field Methods in Linguistics” are NOT the same as doing real fieldwork and have always encouraged the graduate students to go to the field and gain experience as “Field Linguists!” –Samuel Obeng, LINGUIST List 33.3125, Fri Oct 14 2022

See also:

LINGUIST List 33.3142

Sat Oct 15 2022

Featured Linguist: Scott DeLancey

Prerequisites

Students who take this class should have had at least LING 451 and 461. The more linguistics, the better! Training in linguistics will lead you to ask better questions.

Requirements of class participants

All participants

Assist with class logistics

- run the recording device
- process and upload recordings
- obtain and share materials
- bring a snack to class

These will be rotating duties, assigned to different individuals in different weeks.

580E students (4 credit)

- weekly participation in in-class elicitation
- process uploaded recordings
- written assignments (6)
 - 5 weekly, due weeks 4-10
 - final project, due finals week
- assist with class logistics

580F students (2 credit)

- weekly participation in in-class elicitation
- process uploaded recordings
- written assignments (3)
- assist with class logistics

Auditors

- weekly participation in in-class elicitation
- assist with class logistics

Final grades

The assignments are each worth 10 points. From this Canvas calculates a Final Percentage. In calculating final grades, this final percentage will be converted to a UW grade via the following linear scale.

95% and above	4.0
63-94%	interpolated
62%	0.7
61% or lower	0.0

i.e. UW grade = (Final Percentage * .1)-5.5

Final grade determination will also subjectively include an assessment of your overall contribution to the class, which can raise your final grade from the numerical conversion.

Final project options

Nearer the end of the quarter, all 580E students should communicate with me about their choice for the final project.

- (1) Write a (real or mock) grant proposal for field research on Lhasa Tibetan or some other language. 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.

Note: Grants for descriptive linguistics typically target the most urgently needed situations, where linguistic communities are small and/or endangered (with no native speaking children). All aspects of this kind of research can be enhanced and speeded up through the collaboration of native speakers. The research needs to be accomplished in a non-colonial manner, with sensitivity to the needs of the linguistic community, whose priority may be language revitalization (see Wilkins 1992).

(2) Select one of the written assignments, other than the first (bibliographical), turned in during weeks 1-10. Revise and expand it. If you work on the text, you also need to describe some grammatical feature you spot in the text.

(3) Select a syntactic topic to investigate and write up.

Topics and readings

VC = Vaux and Cooper 1999, a book about field methods. Other language-specific readings are be agreed upon and added later after your first assignment.

<i>week</i>	<i>date</i>	<i>reading (lg doc lit)</i>	<i>reading (Tibetan)</i>	<i>in-class discussion</i>	<i>in-class elicitation</i>	<i>assignment due</i>
1	1-4	VC ch. 1, 2		introductions, syllabus review, course logistics; goals of language documentation; field notes; phonology	greetings, basic conversation, random	
2	1-11	VC ch. 7	DeLancey 2017	phonology	contrast and allophony	bibliographical (580E,F)
3	1-18		Gong 2020	phonology, lexicon	contrast and allophony	
4	1-25	VC ch. 3	Hu 2012	lexicon	lexicon	<i>JIPA</i> -style phonological sketch (580E)
5	2-1	VC ch. 9	Denwood 1999 (“Nouns and Noun Phrases” chapter)	nominal and verbal morphology	nominal morphology or syntax	word list from a lexical domain (580E)
6	2-8	VC ch. 10		verbal morphology	verbal morphology or syntax	
7	2-15			verbal morphology; text preparation	verbal morphology or syntax	
8	2-22	VC ch. 16	DeLancey 1999	texts and mini-texts	textual glossing and translation	verbal inflection (580E,F)
9	3-1	VC ch. 11-12		semantics; syntactic features of text, morphosyntax	story boards; textual glossing and translation; morphosyntax	

10	3-8			semantics; syntactic features of text, morphosyntax	story boards; textual glossing and translation; morphosyntax	text (580E,F)
F	3-15					final project (580E)

References cited

- Austin, Peter. 2010. 'Applying for a language documentation research grant.' In *Language Documentation and Description*, ed. by Peter Austin. London: Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project. 285-299.
- DeLancey, Scott. 1999. 'Relativization in Tibetan.' In *Topics in Nepalese linguistics*, ed. by Yogendra Yadava and Warren Glover. Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy. 231-249.
- DeLancey, Scott. 2017. 'Lhasa Tibetan.' In *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*, ed. by Graham Thurgood and Randy J. LaPolla. London and New York: Routledge. 385-403.
- Denwood, Philip. 1999. *Tibetan*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gong, Xun. 2020. 'How many vowels are there in Lhasa Tibetan?' *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 43 (2):225–254.
- Hu, Fang. 2012. 'Tonogenesis in Lhasa Tibetan - Towards a Gestural Account.' In *Consonant Clusters and Structural Complexity*, ed. by Philip Hoole, Lasse Bombien, Marianne Pouplier, Christin Mooshammer and Barbara Kuhnery. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter. 231-253.
- Krauss, Michael. 1992. 'The world's languages in crisis.' *Language* 68:4-10.
- Vaux, Bert, and Justin Cooper. 1999. *Introduction to Linguistic Field Methods*. Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Wilkins, David. 1992. 'Linguistic research under Aboriginal control: A personal account of fieldwork in Central Australia.' *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 12:171-200.
- Wittenburg, Peter. 2003. 'The DOBES Model of Language Documentation.' In *Language Documentation and Description*, ed. by Peter Austin. London: Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project. 122-139.