

# LIN 4930: Languages of the World

## MWF

### Description of the Course

**Overview** This course is a broad survey of the world's languages, their genetic affiliations and current status. By getting acquainted with some of the linguistic properties of various languages and language families, the course aims to provide students with a non-technical overview of the major subfields of linguistics, including general linguistics, geo-linguistics (what languages are spoken where and by whom), and language typology (the ways in which languages are similar and different). One of the important topics the course will address is linguistic diversity – the various ways it can be assessed and how linguists talk about it, the serious threats to that diversity that exist, why this may be a matter of concern, and how to respond to that situation.

The course is meant to cater to different audiences. For students interested in linguistics, it provides an overview of a broad range of phenomena in a variety of languages, and gives them a solid base for studying various linguistic subdisciplines with a greater awareness of the distribution and importance of the linguistic phenomena studied. The course is also a good starting point for learning more about the growing field of language documentation, preservation, and revitalization. For all other students, who may not pursue further studies in linguistics, the course will offer a window into how various socio-cultural factors, government influence, other cultures, migration patterns, influence human language and what that means for the society in general. More importantly, by studying differences and similarities between the world's languages and raising awareness of and sensitivity to linguistic diversity and linguistic issues, the students will gain a better understanding of global social and cultural issues, which may ultimately help them to more effectively communicate with members of other nations and cultures.

**Goals** By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Describe and give examples of the ways in which human languages are alike and how they differ.
- Use and understand basic linguistic terminology.
- Identify the world's major and selected minor languages.
- Discuss different possible relationships between languages
- Discuss the different roles language plays in society.
- Be able to explain the importance of linguistic diversity to individuals and society.
- Understand the pressures on linguistic diversity and the consequences of its loss.

**Prerequisites** There are no prerequisites for this course.

## Course Materials

### Required textbook:

- Pereltsvaig, Asya. 2018. *Languages of the world: An introduction*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Additional readings** will be given to address particular issues related to a language or a language family from the following books:

- Anderson, Stephen R. 2012. *Languages: A very short introduction*. Oxford: OUP.
- Baker, Mark. 2001. *The atoms of language*. Basic Books
- Comrie, Bernard (ed.). 2009. *The World's Major Languages*, 2nd edition. New York: OUP.
- Comrie, Bernard, Stephen Matthews, and Maria Polinsky. 1996. *The atlas of languages: The origin and development of languages throughout the world*. New York: Checkmark.
- Harrison, K. David. 2007. *When languages die: The Extinction of the world's languages and the erosion of human knowledge*. Oxford: OUP.
- McWhorter, John. 2012. *What language is*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Pinker, Steven. 1994. *The language instinct: How the mind creates language*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Song, Jae Jung. 2018. *Linguistic Typology*. Oxford: OUP.

Several journal articles on particular topics will also be included. All additional readings will be available on CANVAS or through the library.

## Evaluation

**Graded components** Attendance and participation in lectures is obligatory. You are required to pick a lesser-known language and become an “expert” on it during the semester. There will be multiple assignments (5-6) asking you to investigate various aspects of the language:

- its speakers, where it is spoken, and its basic grammatical properties (e.g. canonical word order and sound system)
- one or two interesting linguistic phenomena
- the larger language contact situation
- its genetic affiliation(s)
- its level of endangerment
- its social and political status

At the end of the course, you are supposed to summarize what you learned about the language you have been investigating, and connect it to the topics discussed in the class, in an essay of 10-15 pages. Each week there will be an in-class quizz that will address the readings.

The following percentages will be assigned to each component of the grade:

- Class attendance and participation: 15%
- Quizzes: 15%
- Assignments: 40%
- Final essay: 30%

**Assignments** There will be 5-6 assignments in this class, one roughly every two weeks, and a final essay due on the last day of class (**December**). The assignments will be relatively short (2-3 pages plus references). All written work that you turn in must be completely and entirely your own effort. Make sure to acknowledge other people’s work and **cite** all sources you used for your assignments. **Wikipedia will not be accepted as a valid source of information**, though it can be a good start to give you an idea of where to look. You are expected to find real primary sources – books and journal articles. The library search engines are the best resource for this (we will have a library orientation session in the first week to help you with this). All homeworks are to be submitted as PDF documents on CANVAS. Late submissions will not be accepted.

**Grading** The following grading scale will be used:

A	93-100	B-	80-83	D+	67-70
A-	90-93	C+	77-80	D	63-67
B+	87-90	C	73-77	D-	60-63
B	83-87	C-	70-73	E	<60

Additional information about the University’s grade policies is available at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

## Other information

**Missed or late work; absence from class** In general, late work or electronically submitted work will not be accepted. Sometimes, however, absence from class is unavoidable. Acceptable reasons for absence from class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences), military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays and participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations

(e.g., jury duty or subpoena) will also be excused. If you know that you will be unable to complete any work on time, contact the instructor to make prior arrangements. If you are absent on the day an assignment is due, an electronic copy of a completed assignment is usually acceptable. If, for example, you fall ill the night before a deadline, but have completed your homework, you may e-mail a copy to the instructor (see contact details above). You will have to provide a hard copy later, once you return to class, but will not be penalized. If an unexpected emergency arises, please inform your instructor as soon as possible, and no later than two days after the due date, and keep all records (medical or otherwise) pertaining to the unexpected emergency. The more warning you give, the easier it is to arrive at a solution.

**Academic honesty** Academic misconduct, including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism, will not be tolerated. It may result in disciplinary action and failure in the course. The University has an Honor Code which reads as follows: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.” The honor code is accessible online: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>. The bottom line is: “On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

Copying or sharing any part of your homework assignments in any way, shape, or form is strictly prohibited. For computer work, this includes, but is not limited to, using the same file/document as someone else, using a modified file/document, or copying information between files/documents. No written work may be a joint effort in any way unless explicitly permitted and stated.

**Electronics** Cell phones are expected to be on silent and stored away. Cell phone use will not be tolerated and will result in dismissal from class. Laptops and tablets are allowed in class for note-taking purposes only. You will be asked to put away your computer if you are discovered using social media sites in class.

**Accommodations for students with disabilities** Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register online with the Dean of Students Office: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc> The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

**Course evaluations** Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at:

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu>

Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at:

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>

## Schedule of topics and readings

Note that the course schedule and contents are subject to change. A tentative schedule is below.

### **Week 1 (Aug 22-24): Introduction.**

*Topics:* What is (a) language? Typological vs. historical (genetic) relatedness. Genetic relationship and language families. Some basic facts about language(s).

Library orientation session.

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 1, Comrie: Introduction, Pinker: ch 1

### **Week 2 (Aug 27-31): Linguistic diversity and typology.**

*Topics:* How are languages similar and how are they different? How do linguists approach the study of this diversity?

*Readings:* Anderson: ch 1-2, Baker ch 1, Pinker: ch 2

### **Week 3 (Sept 5-7): Indo-European languages.**

*Additional topics:* Understanding the basics of the comparative method in historical linguistics.

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 2, Anderson: ch 3

### **Week 4 (Sep 10-14): Non-Indo-European languages of Europe and India.**

*Additional topics:* Language universals and parameters.

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 3, Baker: ch 2;

### **Week 5 (Sep 17-21): Languages of the Caucasus.**

*Additional topics:* Field linguistics.

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 4, McLaughlin (2001)

### **Week 6 (Sep 24-28): Language endangerment.**

*Additional topics:* Film showing: The Linguists

*Readings:* Anderson: ch 4, Harrison (2007): ch1, ch2

### **Week 7 (Oct 1-5): Linguistic fieldwork and language documentation.**

Guest lectures by field workers

*Readings:* Harrison (2007): ch7, Himmelmann (2006), Dwyer (2006)

**Week 8 (Oct 8-10): Languages of Northern Africa, Middle East and Central Asia.**

Additional topics: Language contact and interaction.

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 5, Ostler: ch 2, 13, 14

**Week 9 (Oct 15-19): Languages of sub-Saharan Africa.**

Additional topics: Official language, trade languages

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 6, McLaughlin (2017)

**Week 10 (Oct 22-26): Socio-political factors, identity, prescriptivism, standardization**

*Readings:* Pinker (1994), Langston & Peti-Stanić (2014)

**Week 11 (Oct 29-Nov 2): Languages of eastern Asia**

Additional topics: Language change

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 7; additional readings TBD

**Week 12 (Nov 5-9): Languages of the South Sea Islands**

Additional topics: Malagasy

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 8; additional readings TBD

**Week 13 (Nov 14-16): Aboriginal languages of Australia and Papua New Guinea**

Additional topics: There are no primitive languages.

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 9; additional readings TBD

**Week 14 (Nov 19): Native languages of the Americas**

Additional topics: Pirahã

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 10

**Week 15 (Nov 26-30): Native languages of the Americas cont'd; Pidgins, Creoles, signed languages**

*Readings:* Pereltsvaig: ch 12, Mufwene 2015

**Week 16 (Dec 3-5): Back to universals and typology**

*Readings:* Greenberg (1966), Dryer (1992), Baker (2009)