LING 27480 / LACS 27480 / HMRT 27480
Linguistic Minorities & Language Rights in the Americas

This syllabus is up-to-date as of: June 2019.

1 Basic information and course description

Instructor: Adam Roth Singerman
Adam’s e-mail: adamsingerman@uchicago.edu
Adam’s title: Teaching Fellow in the Humanities
Adam’s preferred pronouns: he, him, his
Quarter: Spring 2019
Meeting time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3 to 4:20
Classroom: Social Sciences Research Building 107
Office hours: by appointment in Adam’s office (Rosenwald 205G)

This course examines the ongoing struggle to maintain, preserve, and revitalize the native languages of the Americas. We ask how that struggle can be better understood as part of a wider initiative, grounded in human rights, to promote indigenous cultural traditions in the face of the European colonization/invasion of the New World. Issues addressed in this course will include: the history of indigenous American languages; the interrelated phenomena of language shift, language endangerment, and language death; and the maintenance and survival of endangered languages of the Americas into the present day. We ask whether recent efforts at the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages are compatible with community-internal language ideologies, with known cases of shift from one indigenous language to another, and with processes of ethno-genesis triggered (at least in part) by European interference. In readings and class discussions we will focus in particular on the Uto-Aztecan peoples of the United States and Mexico; the modern Maya of Guatemala and Mexico; the Aymara and Quechua speakers of the Andes; and the various Native peoples who participate in the Upper Rio Negro contact zone (Brazil and Colombia).

2 Prerequisites
This course will assume no background in linguistics. Relevant linguistic topics, such as historical relations between indigenous languages of the Americas, will be introduced in the course without
any assumption of prior knowledge. While it will be helpful for students to have knowledge of Spanish, Portuguese, or a native language of the Americas, this is not necessary; all required readings will be in English. Students may benefit from having taken at least one quarter of the Latin American Civilizations sequence (but this, too, is optional).

3 Evaluation
The students’ final grades will be based on their performance in the following three areas:

1. regular attendance and participation in classroom discussions
2. regular posts to the Canvas sites in response to the readings
3. taking part in the final project (the collective annotated bibliography)

Students are expected to attend each class session and to actively participate in discussion. To make our classroom time as effective as possible, students should always complete the readings in advance of the class when they are due. For each reading, please post one to two paragraphs to the discussion board on our Canvas site by noon on the day of class. In these discussion posts you should raise follow-up questions in response to the readings. You should feel free to be critical (in a productive way) if you feel that doing so is warranted.

For the final project we’ll be creating a collective annotated bibliography. Students will have the opportunity to seek out material on topics of interest to them. Each person will be responsible for discussing several peer-reviewed articles and/or significant portions of a book manuscript. The idea is to create a group document that (a) will be useful for all of us and (b) will reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the course (and the students’ diverse set of interests).

4 Accommodations
Please provide a letter from Student Disability Services as soon as possible in order for me to accommodate your needs during our class. It’s the policy of the University not to offer retroactive accommodations, so providing the letter now, at the beginning of the quarter, is key.

5 Readings and laptops
You do not need to buy any books for this course. All assigned readings will be accessible in digital form through the University of Chicago Library or, failing that, posted as PDFs to the Canvas site. You are encouraged to make use of our Library’s ample digital resources, including the wonderful Oxford and Cambridge Handbooks.

I request that you do not use laptops or cellphones during class except to follow the readings.
6 Class plan and readings

Monday, April 1st
No class because of instructor’s conference travel.

Wednesday, April 3rd & Monday, April 8th
Historical linguistics and indigenous American linguistic diversity.

- Introduction, section I (‘Race and Language’) from Franz Boas’s Introduction to the *Handbook of American Indian Languages*
  UChicago Library link: https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/10517177

- Chapter 3 (‘The Origin of American Indian Languages’) from Lyle Campbell’s 1997 monograph, *American Indian Languages: The Historical Languages of Native America*
  UChicago Library link: http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2449046

Wednesday, April 10th
Early theorizing around language endangerment and language death.

  link: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1262876

  link: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1265162

Monday, April 15th
More on the theory of language endangerment and language death.

- continued discussion of Swadesh 1948 and Hill 1983

  link: http://www.jstor.org/stable/416368 (please read the contributions by Hale and Krauss)

- optional:
  selections from Evans, Nicholas. 2010. *Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
  UChicago Library link: http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/10369773


**Wednesday, April 17th**

Critiquing the theory and rhetoric of language endangerment.


- **optional:**

**Monday, April 22nd**

More critiques of the theory and rhetoric of language endangerment.


  
  UChicago Library link: [https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11134408](https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11134408)

**Wednesday, April 24th**

Language vitality and standardization in Mesoamerica.

Monday, April 29th
More on language vitality and standardization in Mesoamerica, with a special focus on the Mayan languages of Guatemala.

  link: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3567138


  link: www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/379682

Wednesday, May 1st
Complications surrounding documentation, revitalization, and standardization: two Guatemalan case studies.

  link: www.jstor.org/stable/44126592


Monday, May 6th
Language rights and their legal context in human rights discourse, with a focus on contradictions within the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

  DOI: 10.3102/0091732X13506694


• optional:

Wednesday, May 8th
Problematising language rights via a North American case study.

Monday, May 13th
Introduction to language contact and language history in South America. (There aren’t any readings assigned for today. Please take the opportunity to work on your final bibliographies and also to make up any Canvas discussion posts that you are behind on.)

Wednesday, May 15th
More on language contact and language history in South America.


• optional:

• optional:
Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
UChicago Library link: https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/8626320

Monday, May 20th
Do Native Andean cord-keeping practices constitute reading and writing? A look at the still enigmatic khipus.

  UChicago Library link: https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/8884872


• optional:
  UChicago Library link: https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/8884872

• optional:
  Urton, Gary. 2014. ‘From Middle Horizon cord-keeping to the rise of Inka khipus in the central Andes.’ Antiquity 88:205–221.
  DOI: 10.1017/S0003598X00050316

Wednesday, May 22nd
The continuation of cord-keeping into the present day, and the ramifications of our understanding of indigeneity in the Andes.

  UChicago Library link: https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/10516334
Monday, May 27th
No class because of Memorial Day. Please e-mail Adam with an update about your annotated bibliography: what topic you’ve settled on, what sources you’re planning on including, what problems (if any) you’ve run into, etc.

Wednesday, May 29th
Can we make human rights discourse intelligible across linguistic and cultural boundaries? A case study from Chiapas, Mexico.


Monday, June 3rd and Wednesday, June 5th
Synthesis and discussion of the themes we’ve addressed this quarter, with informal presentations by students about the topics they’ve chosen for their annotated bibliographies.

Friday, June 7th
Deadline for graduating seniors to submit their annotated bibliographies.

Friday, June 14th
Deadline for everyone else to submit their annotated bibliographies.