**Overview**

The task of language documentation is to provide a “comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community” (Himmelmann 1998: 166). With its focus on the linguistic record, language documentation remains central to all approaches to linguistics, irrespective of theoretical framework. More recently, with increasing awareness of global language endangerment crisis, language documentation has come to be recognized as a distinct subfield within the discipline, with its own methodologies, tools, and theoretical underpinnings. This course provides an introduction to this emerging field.

The course covers the history, method, and theory behind language documentation, and the role that language endangerment plays in shaping the field of language documentation. It will offer discussion of the skills required to undertake language documentation, including preparing for fieldwork; obtaining funding; collecting data; conducting language surveys; designing orthographies, grammars, and dictionaries; processing texts; adapting documentary materials for language revitalization or maintenance purposes; and disseminating and archiving research products. More broadly, the course serves as an introduction to the Language Documentation and Conservation track, to the UHM Linguistics Program, and to graduate study more broadly.

**Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this course students will be able to:

- understand the issue of endangered languages
- describe the foundations of language documentation as a distinct subfield
- develop a proposal for a language documentation project
- be familiar with the methods and techniques of language documentation

**Course format and responsibilities**

This is a seminar course, and lectures will be kept to a minimum. Students will be responsible for reading, presenting, and discussing articles in class. Attendance and participation is required. Unexcused absences will result in lowering of your course grade. Late assignments will be accepted only in extenuating circumstances, and only at reduced credit.
Readings

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, we draw on readings from the vast and growing literature on language documentation. While the amount of reading assigned may seem daunting, it is both necessary and realistic. Scholarship is incremental. As academic linguists our contributions are useful only to the extent that they are contextualized within previous research. You don’t need to memorize every reading, but you should understand enough of the main points that you can easily go back to find the details. Learning to read efficiently will serve you well not only in this course but throughout your career at UH and beyond.

Readings are listed in the schedule on the week that they will be discussed. This means that those readings should be completed prior to the first class meeting of that week. For each reading you should submit two discussion questions to the instructor via email no later than 5:00 pm Monday in the relevant week (i.e., the day preceding the first class meeting of the week). For some weeks only a subset of the listed readings will be assigned; this will be announced by the instructor during the preceding week. Please note that the reading schedule may be revised over the course of the term to accommodate student interest in particular topics, thus the schedule below serves as a rough guide only.

Course readings can be downloaded from bit.ly/ling680. Note that we will not be using Laulima courseware in this class.

There are several good texts on language documentation and field work. We will draw on parts of these for our readings in this class, but you may want to consult other chapters in these volumes as well.


Essays

Roughly 2-4 pages (~1000 words), reflecting on various topics in language documentation.

• Essay #1, due Sept 1. Evaluate a media report of a “language obituary” or an endangered language. Based on this report discuss how endangered languages are conceptualized in the popular media.
• Essay #2, due Sept 27. Discuss a domain of knowledge which you feel have been given inadequate attention by documentary linguistics. Why is this domain significant, and how would you propose to improve the documentation of this domain?
• Essay #3, due Oct 18. Reflecting on the film The Linguists, discuss the role of the linguist in language documentation.

Final Project

As a final project you will prepare a grant proposal for an language documentation project, following the guidelines for one of the major granting agencies, such as the following:
This need not be a real project, but it should be written as if it were. Choose a language to focus on and include all background information for that language, including a review of previous literature on the language. 10-15 pages, plus a 10-15 minute oral presentation.

**Grading**

| Participation | 25% | • Regular class attendance and active participation in class discussions  
• Two discussion questions per reading emailed to the instructor by 5:00 pm Monday each week |
| Essays | 30% | Short essays on various topics related to course readings. |
| Final project | 45% | Grant proposal for an endangered language documentation project |

**Electronic Device Policy**

Course readings will be distributed electronically, so in lieu of printing you may want to bring a device capable of displaying the readings. In our increasingly interconnected world, having a device in class brings the temptation to multitask during class time. I do not have a blanket policy against device use in class. However, if your device becomes a distraction for you, your colleagues, or your instructor, then I will make the readings available to you in print form and ask that you cease use of the device during class.

**Tentative Schedule (subject to revision)**

**Week 1 (Aug 23, 25) Endangered languages and the field of language documentation**
- Nettle, Daniel & Suzanne Romaine. 2000. Where have all the languages gone? Vanishing Voices (chapter 1).

**Week 2 (Aug 30, Sept 1) Endangered languages: Why should we care?**
Week 3: (Sept 6, 8) Defining language documentation

Sept 7: Lands, Seas, and Skies: Conversations with science, tradition, and the sacred

Week 4 (Sept 13, 15) Documentation vs. Description, and issues of adequacy

Week 5 (Sept 20, 22) Endangered Domains and Biocultural Diversity

Week 6 (Sept 27, 29) Endangered languages fieldwork

Week 7 (Oct 4, 6) Project planning and grant writing 101

Week 8 (Oct 11, 13)
- Film: The Linguists

Week 9 (Oct 18, 20) Life in the field
**Week 10 (Oct 25, 27) Orthography design**


**Week 11 (Nov 1, 3) Data management, access, and archiving**


**Week 12 (Nov 8, 10) Ethics and collaboration**


**Week 13 (Nov 15, 17) Community engagement**


**Week 14 (Nov 22, 24) Assessing language vitality**


Week 15 (Nov 29, Dec 1) Language revitalization/maintenance/conservation

Week 16 (Dec 6, 8) Final project presentations

Disabilities services
Any student who feels she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability is invited to contact me privately. I would be happy to work with you, and the KOKUA Program (Office for Students with Disabilities) to ensure reasonable accommodations in my course. KOKUA can be reached at (808) 956-7511 or (808) 956-7612 (voice/text) in room 013 of the Queen Lili‘uokalani Center for Student Services.