

Ling 332: Linguistic Field Methods

Fall 2003

Meeting times: T,TH 12:30-1:50

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Course description:

In this course we will learn how to document an unfamiliar language by interacting with a person who speaks it natively. Over the course of the term, we will gain some familiarity with the phonology, morphology and syntax of the language while developing techniques for studying a new language more generally and approaching a language consultant. In addition, we will learn about practical issues in linguistic fieldwork. Although we will not be enduring the hardships of actually being in the field, we will approach our investigation with a clean slate, treating our language as though it had never been documented before. Together, we will be developing a dictionary, grammatical sketch and traveler's phrase book for the language.

Course Requirements:

Participation: This course demands an unusually high degree of participation from everyone. This means that you must be present at every class session. If you miss more than 1 session, your grade will be lowered by 1/3 of a grade and will be lowered 1/3 for every subsequent absence. We will have a plan of action every time we meet, but we are guaranteed to deviate from that plan due to the unexpected. We must all be prepared to follow our consultant and/or the elicitation leader along these detours.

Role playing: Each elicitation session requires an elicitation leader and a primary transcriber. Roles will rotate each week. The elicitation leader is responsible for the direction that each elicitation session takes, from plans (determined in consultation with the whole class during the previous meeting) to detours. Everyone will be taking notes, but the primary transcriber will be responsible for making sure that everything in the session is transcribed and agreed upon. We will record each session so that transcriptions can be double-checked or reanalysed. The transcriber will also be responsible for entering our data into the class database (maintained in Cresap 112N).

Projects: The class will be broken up into several small groups. Each group will be responsible for a piece of several projects. Together the groups will write (a) a visitor's phrase book, (b) a lexicon and short grammatical sketch, (c) a transcribed, glossed and translated text (e.g., a short story told by our speaker).

Procedure:

We will learn about linguistic documentation by documenting as much as we can of one particular language through consultation with a native speaker. This quarter, the language under study will be Wolof, a language from the Atlantic group of the Niger-Congo family. This is one of the major indigenous languages of Senegal, spoken natively by approximately 3 million people. Although Wolof has been documented to some extent, we will avoid consultation of prior work in order to develop our own abilities. Our work will be aimed toward the production of a lexicon, representing the form, meaning, and use of the closed-class formatives (function words and inflectional morphology), as well as what we can of the open-class formatives (typically nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives) and derivational processes. To do this, we inevitably must discover quite a bit about grammar and so we will spend some time working out the basic syntactic details of the language. Our lexicon will therefore be accompanied by a short grammatical sketch. Our lexicon will be stored as a FileMaker Pro database. In addition, all elicited sentences will be stored in a FileMaker Pro database. Both databases will be maintained by the class on the computer called Flatt in Cresap 112N.

We'll work as follows. On Tuesdays, just the class will meet and we will discuss our progress, talk about general fieldwork issues and plan our elicitation session for Thursday. On Thursdays, we'll practice "guided elicitation"—our native speaker will join us in class and the elicitation leader will lead us in elicitation on various topics (with me there to help out). Furthermore, you'll each have a chance to work with our native speaker in small groups for two hours a week with me (usually) not present. There you'll work on specific elicitation assignments and (eventually) projects. There will be two or three small groups and meetings will be scheduled according to everyone's convenience.

Tools:

Each student will need the following:

- A 1-subject notebook dedicated to your field notes

- Several blank CDs (CD-R or CD-RW).

- The elicitation leader is responsible for recording the session onto a CD (we will go through the recording procedure before the first elicitation session).

- The primary transcriber is responsible for backing up the current state of the databases onto a CD each week.

Texts:

Vaux, Bert and Justin Cooper 1999. *Introduction to Linguistic Field Methods*. Lincom Europa.

Newman, Paul and Martha Ratliff. 2001. *Linguistic Fieldwork*. Cambridge University Press.

Other Useful Readings:

- Comrie, Bernard, and Norval Smith. 1977. "Lingua descriptive series: questionnaire," *Lingua* 42:1-72.
- Craig, Colette. 1979. "Jacaltec: field work in Guatamala," in Timothy Shopen (ed.), *Languages and their speakers*. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop. pp. 3-57
- Himmelman, Nikolaus. 1998. "Documentary and descriptive linguistics," *Linguistics* 36:161-195.
- Hoijer, Harry. ed. 1946. *Linguistic structures of Native America*. Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology 6.
- Nida, Eugene A. 1946. *Morphology, the descriptive analysis of the word*. Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press.
- Samarin, William J. 1967. *Field linguistics, a guide to linguistic field work*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Wilkins, David P., 1992. "Linguistic research under Aboriginal control: A personal account of field work in Central Australia," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 12:171-200.

Web Resources:

- Ethnologue entry for Senegal (includes language map)
http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Senegal
- UCLA Wolof Web Site
<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/Wolof/>
- Ethnographic Information on Wolof Culture
http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/EthnoAtlas/Hmar/Cult_dir/Culture.7882
- Wolof Tongue Twisters
<http://www.uebersetzung.at/twister/wo.htm>
- Republic of Senegal Official Government Website (in French)
<http://www.primature.sn/>
- US Department of State Background Note: Senegal
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2862.htm>
- CIA World Factbook: Senegal
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sg.html>

Schedule of activities:

Week 1: 9/25

- Basic Introduction.
- Administrative details
- Introduction to Wolof
- Introduction to database
- Introduction to field recording

Week 2: 9/30, 10/2

In your first session with the consultant, elicit as many words as you can from the Swadesh list. Get each word in isolation, and in a very simple sentence.

Read for Tuesday: V&C Chapter 1-2. N&R Chapters 1, 4.

Week 3: 10/7-9

Elicit as many nouns as you can, getting the following forms:

- (a) singular
- (b) plural
- (c) possessed for all persons and numbers of the possessor (my, your, his/her/its, our, your, their)
- (d) One (consistent) form with a demonstrative or determiner, e.g., English 'a tree,' 'the tree', or 'this tree'.

Be sure to do this for as wide a semantic range of nouns as possible.

Assignment due Tuesday:

- a) Photocopy and turn in your notes from week 2.
- b) Work with your group to make a preliminary summary of the consonant and vowel segments that occur in your corpus so far, and the syllable shapes you think you are seeing there (formalize them as CV, CVV, CVC, etc.). You are free to indicate whether any sets of segments pattern as allophones of the same phoneme; however, that should not be your main goal in this assignment. Turn in a group summary.

Read for Tuesday: V&C Chapters 3, 9. N&R Chapters 9

Week 4: 10/14-16

Elicit as many new verbs as you can, getting the following kinds of forms:

- (a) All persons and numbers of subject, to the extent necessary;
- (b) For transitive/ditransitive verbs, all persons and numbers of object, to the extent necessary.
- (c) As full a set of tense/aspect distinctions as you can (give priority to simple forms over compound or periphrastic forms (i.e., forms involving repetitive auxiliaries). Be sure to do this for as wide a semantic range of verbs as possible.
- (d) negative forms

Read for Tuesday: V&C Chapter 10. N&R Chapter 11.

Assignment Due Tuesday:

- a) Photocopy and turn in your notes from week 3.
- b) Work with your group to see if you can establish classes of noun stems according to how they form singular, plural, possessed, and demonstrative forms. These classes may end up being phonologically defined, morphologically defined, semantically defined, or, failing any of these, simply arbitrarily defined. It may also be some combination of these possibilities (as with gender in Romance languages). Turn in a group summary of your analysis.

Week 5: 10/21-23

Assignment due Tuesday:

- a) Photocopy and turn in your notes from week 4.
- b) Work with your group to see if you can establish classes of verb stems according to how they combine with forms for person, number, tense, aspect, or anything else you find relevant. These classes may end up being phonologically defined, morphologically defined, semantically defined, or, failing any of these, simply arbitrarily defined. It may also be some combination of these possibilities (as with the conjugations in Romance languages). Be sure to indicate as large a verbal paradigm as you can. Turn in a group summary.

The content of the elicitation session this week will depend on our progress to date and on what questions we feel have been insufficiently addressed to this point.

- Discussion topic for Tuesday:

Find a dictionary—any dictionary, but in class I will have given you some suggestions—and describe what kinds of information it includes and how that information is organized. Can you think of some kinds of information, or some alternative types of organization, that might have been useful or valuable in this dictionary?

Read for Tuesday: N&R Chapter 5.

Week 6: 10/28-30

Work to produce a visitor's phrase book. Include greetings, leave-takings, simple questions/requests/commands, direction and orientation, and likely-to-be-needed collocations in simple situations (eating, finding a place to stay, looking for someone, dealing with illness...and whatever else you think of.) Divide the sections of the phrase books so that each group is working on different material.

Week 7: 11/4-6

Prepare a lexicon covering your corpus so far, along with a thumbnail grammatical sketch. The sketch should have sections for phonology, morphology, and syntax. It will be limited, of course, by the preliminary nature of your corpus, but this is no reason not to attempt such a summary. Please provide two copies.

Use your time with the consultant to augment and clear up problems in your Thumbnail grammars.

Week 8: 11/11-13

Basic syntax. Work with the consultant to determine the structure of yes/no questions, wh-questions, complement clauses, relative clauses, basic adjectival/adverbial modification structures and any other important structures you believe are missing from your grammatical sketch.

Read for Tuesday: V&C Chapters 11-12.

Week 9: 11/18-20

- (a) Record a short text.
- (b) Text transcription/translation/analysis. Work with the consultant to transcribe, translate, and gloss a portion (to be specified in class) of the text, and to turn in a xerox of your notes, and a clean re-presentation of your results.
- (c) In your clean draft, flag those items that you had trouble segmenting, labelling, or analyzing.

Read for Tuesday: V&C Chapter 16, N&R Chapter 7.

Week 10: 11/25 (11/27 = Thanksgiving)

Work with the consultant to clear up difficult passages in our text (to be identified in class) using the techniques that Samarin calls 'substitution' and 'ancillary' elicitation. Turn in a photocopy of your notes, and use them as a basis for discussion and further analysis of the 'difficult passages.' Of course, you are also free to flag any new problems or solutions that your new material brings up.

Reading week – Finals week:

Prepare an edition of the text we've elicited so far. The edition should be "interlinear," including a line that is phonemically transcribed; a line for English glosses for each word; a line that is morphologically segmented; a line of morpheme-by-morpheme analytic glosses; and a line giving a free translation for each sentence. Please provide two copies.

Completion of class lexicon and grammatical sketch (2 copies).

Final edition of lexicon, grammatical sketch and text due 12/11