

Response to our message on the LinguistList

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At San Diego State University our Field Methods class is given once every two years, most recently, Spring 2005. I am the one who regularly gives it. For the last three times, the language has been Mixtec. This is the only time I have used the same language three times in a row, and I wasn't going to use it last Spring, but it fit in with language revitalization efforts in the community and a grant project in another department. Mixtec is the largest Native American language in the San Diego area, even though Mixtecs are not indigenous to this region, but most of the Mexican agricultural workers in this area are Mixtec speakers, who commute to Oaxaca, and there are now communities of Mixtec residents in several parts of San Diego county and in Baja.

We now have in this area three Mixtec native speakers with metalinguistic ability, i.e. the ability to teach their language competently, and all three were trained by being informant in my field methods class. The Latin American Studies department at SDSU instituted Mixtec classes about 4 years ago, using as teacher the woman who was my first informant. My second informant was a girl who then became the first Mixtec speaker to graduate from SDSU, and last spring all three of my informants, with assistance from me and some other SDSU departments, set up an organization to teach heritage Mixtec to children in the community. Many of the Mixtecs in this area are monolingual Mixtec speakers, with some pidgin English, that is, contrary to popular stereotype, they don't speak Spanish. The children are growing up speaking only English.

The other endangered language that I have used in Field Methods was Hmong, which I did twice, and that was some time ago, when the refugees from Indo-China were first arriving in great numbers in San Diego. Our graduate students who taught ESL in the community reported that with the Vietnamese, you started by telling them how to pronounce the letters in English, while with the Hmong, you started by showing them how to hold a pencil. Most of the Hmong have now moved on to other areas; see Ann Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. My most successful student from Hmong field methods was Annie Jaisser, who is now a nationally known expert on Hmong and was language consultant for Ann Fadiman.

Other languages I have used in Field Methods: Eskimo (Barrow), Quechua, Javanese, Kurdish, Qashqay (a field project of my own). I have my eye on Chaldean (Aramaic), of which there is a substantial local community.

There's no syllabus; you can't plan a field methods course in any kind of detail in advance, and as a graduate class, it's very small.