

# Attention!

This is a representative syllabus.

The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

## Linguistics 3902: Language Endangerment & Language Death

### Syllabus

Dr. Brian D. Joseph

**Class meetings:** Twice a week, 80 minutes per class meeting

**Office hours:** xxx

(but **preferably by appointment**; meetings can be in-person or via Zoom, and note that I am available for consultation via e-mail on a regular basis)

**Contact:** [joseph.1@osu.edu](mailto:joseph.1@osu.edu) / 614-292-9446

**Course Website:** Carmen offers an electronic presence for the course; I expect you to check the Carmen site for the course regularly for announcements, assignments, and the like. Various course materials will be posted in the “Content” area of the Carmen site for the course.

#### **Class description:**

Of the circa 7,000 languages in the world today, more than half are seriously in danger of losing all their speakers and thus dying out altogether as living languages. In this course we will study this phenomenon of *language endangerment* (and *language death*)—and by the same token, *dialect endangerment* (and *death*). The course will focus chiefly on how language endangerment arises from (geographic, social, and economic) human migration, mobility, or immobility, and conversely, how being a speaker of a minority or endangered language (or dialect) affects the way individuals and groups experience and form identities around their history of migration or (im)mobility. The following questions are guiding foci for the course content:

- What are the social, economic, and political causes of migration and how does migration lead to language/dialect endangerment?
- What is the relationship between (im)migration, colonization, and forced migration on the one hand and the emergence of potentially fragile linguistic minorities on the other?
- How does minority status for a language/dialect shape its speakers’ identity, attitudes, beliefs, or values?
- How does contact with minority languages/dialects shape the identity, attitudes, beliefs, or values of majority-language/dialect speakers?
- Do new language forms that arise as immigrant varieties of the dominant majority language or as a result of colonization (i.e., “creoles”) serve to stem the tide of language endangerment?
- How do scholars from different disciplines (linguists, anthropologists, economists, film makers, others), as well as speakers themselves, interpret the relationship between migration, language endangerment/diversity, and identity?

- Are there meaningful parallels between language/dialect endangerment and the endangerment of biological species? Between linguistic diversity and bio-diversity?
- What effects can endangerment have on the structure of a language/dialect?
- Can language/dialect endangerment and death be reversed? Are revitalization efforts possible? Are they successful?

The course does not presuppose any knowledge of linguistics. Throughout the semester, critical principles and methods of linguistics are introduced as needed that are relevant to the study of language endangerment (e.g., the embedding of language in society, the interaction between language and culture, the relation of speakers to their language, how languages are structured, how languages change, etc.).

**Course Goals:** Successful students will...

1. ... reflect upon the reasons for expansionist colonialism and how these factors affect the use and vitality of languages used by colonized/indigenous populations.
2. ... react meaningfully to accounts of the immigrant and/or minority experience to come to an understanding of the interconnectedness of individuals, social groups, and geopolitics in shaping such experience.
3. ... recognize the ideologies underlying and informing indigenous and immigrant minority speakers' own use of their language and their attempts at language maintenance and revitalization.
4. ... react meaningfully to scholarly, literary, and cinematic renditions of themes pertaining to the immigrant and/or minority experience by way of exploring the complexities of such experience.
5. ... explore how social and/or economic immobility can lead to language endangerment and the motivations for group language choices.

### **Legacy General Education (GEL) Information**

This class fulfills the Legacy General Education requirement for a **Cross-Disciplinary Seminar**.  
Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes:

*Learning Goals:* Students demonstrate an understanding of a topic of interest through scholarly activities that draw upon multiple disciplines and through their interactions with students from different majors.

*Expected Learning Outcomes:*

1. Students understand the benefits and limitations of different disciplinary perspectives.
2. Students understand the benefits of synthesizing multiple disciplinary perspectives.
3. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from diverse disciplines to a topic of interest.

This class will fulfill these Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes by having students examine factors in language endangerment, language loss, and threats to language viability, viewing these linguistic issues primarily through the lens of what it means to be a member of a minority and how minority status within a larger polity has an impact on language use by individuals and groups.

Students will read, analyze, and evaluate multiple disciplinary perspectives on language endangerment and language loss, and will learn to synthesize these different disciplinary perspectives through multiple assignments engaging with these ideas and simulating the experiences of minorities as well as fieldworkers and community activists battling the linguistic effects of minority life.

### **New General Education (GEN) Information**

This course fulfills the specific requirements and expected learning outcomes for the New General Education Theme category **Migration, Mobility, and Immobility** (hereafter, MMI). Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes (ELO):

#### *Goals:*

Successful students will..

Goal 1: ... analyze an important topic or idea at a more advanced and in-depth level than the Foundations. In this context, “advanced” refers to courses that are e.g., synthetic, rely on research or cutting-edge findings, or deeply engage with the subject matter, among other possibilities.

Goal 2: ... integrate approaches to the theme by making connections to out-of-classroom experiences with academic knowledge or across disciplines and/or to work they have done in previous classes and that they anticipate doing in future.

Goal 3: ... explore and analyze a range of perspectives on migration, mobility, and immobility, including causes and effects, personal or group experiences, or artistic expression.

Goal 4: ... explain a variety of scholarly or artistic approaches to understanding mobility and immobility, and analyze how texts, perceptions, representations, discourses, or artifacts represent these concerns.

#### *Expected Learning Outcomes:*

Successful students are able to...

*ELO 1.1:* ... engage in critical and logical thinking.

*ELO 1.2:* ... engage in an advanced, in-depth, scholarly exploration of the topic or ideas within this theme.

*ELO 2.1:* ... identify, describe, and synthesize approaches or experiences.

*ELO 2.2:* ... demonstrate a developing sense of self as a learner through reflection, self-assessment, and creative work, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts.

*ELO 3.1:* ... explain environmental, political, economic, social, or cultural causes of migration, mobility, and/or immobility.

*ELO 3.2:* ... to describe and analyze diverse experiences or portrayals of migration, mobility, or immobility (e.g. migration, incarceration, disability, or flight) and the complex effects of these phenomena on individuals, societies, institutions, and/or places.

*ELO 4.1:* ... discuss how migration, mobility, or immobility have shaped attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and values of individuals and/or institutions.

*ELO 4.2:* ... describe how people (e.g. scholars, artists, scientists, etc.) perceive or represent migration, mobility, or immobility and critique conventions, theories, and/or ideologies that influence such perceptions or representations.

This class fulfills these Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes by examining migration, mobility, and immobility as central factors in historical developments pertaining to language endangerment, language loss, and threats to language viability, viewing these linguistic issues primarily through the lens of what it means to be a speaker of a minority language and how minority status within a larger polity has an impact on language use by individuals and groups, and their beliefs, values, and identity.

Students will read, analyze, and evaluate multiple perspectives on these developments and learn to express themselves through multiple assignments engaging with these ideas and simulating the experiences of minorities as well as fieldworkers and community activists battling the linguistic effects of minority life. Through this course, students will gain a solid understanding of the impact of migration, mobility, and immobility around the world on language, as a basic human means of expression and as a basic human right.

**Required readings:**

1. *Language Death*, by David Crystal (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002) [required]
2. *When Languages Die. The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*, by K. David Harrison (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007) [required]
3. *Revivalistics*, by Ghilad Zuckerman (Oxford Univ. Press, 2022) [required]
4. The following articles and book chapters, mostly from linguistics journals or e-books *that are available in downloadable form through Main Library*; the nondownloadable readings will be placed on the Carmen website for the course.

Bird, Steven & Gary Simons. 2003. Seven dimensions of portability for language documentation and description. *Language* 79.557-582. [26 pp.]

- About the work of documentary linguists and fieldworkers

Dobrin, Lise. 2008. From linguistic elicitation to eliciting the linguist: Lessons in community empowerment from Melanesia. *Language* 84.2.300-324. [25 pp.]

- About the work of documentary linguists, fieldworkers, and community workers

Dorian, Nancy. 1993. A response to Ladefoged's other view of endangered languages. *Language* 69.575-579. [5 pp.]

- About minority speakers' experience within their societies

Gramley, Chuck & Christine Wilson. 2005. ASL in Central Ohio. In *Language diversity in Michigan and Ohio. Towards two state linguistic profiles* (Ed. by B. Joseph, C. Preston, & D. Preston. Caravan Books). [6 pp.]

- About minority speakers' experience within their societies

Grenoble, Lenore & Lindsay Whaley. 2005. Review article on *Language Endangerment and Language Maintenance and Language Death and Language Maintenance*. *Language* 81.4.965-974. [10 pp.]

Hale, Kenneth; Michael Krauss; Lucille Watahomigie & Akira Yamamoto; Colette Craig; La Verne Jeanne; Nora England. 1992. Endangered languages. *Language* 68.1-42. [42 pages]

- A ground-breaking article that set in motion the study of language endangerment; provides key background to the need for language documentation and to the exploration of causes of language endangerment, including social, political, and geographic mobility/immobility

Hinton, Leanne. 1994. *Flutes of Fire: Essays on California Indian Languages*. Berkeley: Heyday Books.

- The vignettes discussed deal especially with immobility, since they document the experiences of indigenous peoples of California who have lived there for millennia

Kahane, Henry & Renee Kahane. 1979. Decline and survival of Western prestige languages. *Language* 55.183-98. [16 pp.]

- Shows how attitudes even about once-dominant languages can change due to conditions of immobility (in Western Europe)

Keiser, Steven H. 2005. Pennsylvania German in Ohio. In *Language diversity in Michigan and Ohio. Towards two state linguistic profiles* (Ed. by B. Joseph, C. Preston, & D. Preston. Ann Arbor: Caravan Books). [21 pp.]

- Shows how economic factors (diversification beyond agriculture) in the context of Amish immobility have facilitated retention of the community language

Kurz, Claudia. 1998. *Prepositions, Noun Phrases, and Simplification in Contact Varieties of German*. Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University.

- Discusses how economic factors drove migration from southern Europe to Germany and the linguistic consequences for these migrants as they attempt to assimilate into German society

Ladefoged, Peter. 1992. Another view of endangered languages. *Language* 68.809-811. [3 pages]

- Paired with Dorian 1992 (above), discusses minority speakers' experience within their societies and the role of the outside linguist/scientist vis-à-vis the community

Mufwene, Salikoko. 2004. Language birth and death. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33.201-222. [22 pp.]

- Gives a picture of how colonization leads to subjugation of indigenous immobile populations and how they must react when confronted with the colonizers' language

Pappas, Panayiotis. 2005. Greek in Columbus, Ohio. In *Language diversity in Michigan and Ohio. Towards two state linguistic profiles* (Ed. by B. Joseph, C. Preston, & D. Preston. Ann Arbor: Caravan Books) [7 pp.]

- About minority speakers' experience within their societies, a sort of "peaceful coexistence through assimilation" but with some retention of ethnic identity

Ramos-Pellicia, Michelle. 2005. The pronunciation of Spanish in Lorain, Ohio. In *Language diversity in Michigan and Ohio. Towards two state linguistic profiles* (Ed. by B. Joseph, C. Preston, & D. Preston. Ann Arbor: Caravan Books). [15 pp.]

- Shows how economic factors (Puerto Ricans seeking work in the continental US) led to migration and the factors that have contributed retention or rejection of the community language in the face of needing to interact in the societally dominant language

Vigoureux, Cécile B. & Salikoko S. Mufwene, eds. 2020. *Bridging Linguistics and Economics*. Cambridge University Press.

- This is a work filled with case-studies of economically-driven mobility and migration and the consequences for speakers and communities

Wolfram, Walt & Natalie Schilling-Estes. 1995. Moribund dialects and the language endangerment canon: The case of the Ocracoke Brogue. *Language* 71.696-721. [26 pp.]

- Documents at the dialect level how an immobile population (the long-time residents of Ocracoke Island (North Carolina)) is affected by an external dominant dialect (Standard English) and culture and how the minority islanders develop an attitude of local pride in the face of the dominant dialect/culture.

**Course Requirements (with percentage toward final grade):**

1. Keeping up with assigned readings: . . . . . 0% (but crucial to the successful completion of other requirements)
2. Regular class attendance: . . . . . 5% (to be taken at each class; attendance is crucial to the successful completion of other requirements, as material covered in class is not necessarily covered in the readings yet is critical to understanding concepts)
3. Adopt-a-language project (in-class presentation and write-up; work in small groups (up to three students) is permitted with approval) . . . . . 30% (see below on collaboration)
4. Field Experience Exercises (details forthcoming)
  - a. Virtual fieldwork (via internet) . . . . . 10%
  - b. Live linguistic or genealogical fieldwork report: . . . 10%
5. Mini Written Assignments:
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> assignment (on newspaper item): . . . . . 5%
  - b. Questions re 1<sup>st</sup> Movie: . . . . . 5%
  - c. Questions re 2<sup>nd</sup> Movie: . . . . . 5%
6. Preparation for and participation in Class Debate (details forthcoming; NB: the debate serves as the final exam and is held during the final exam period): ..... 30%

I reserve the right to alter the number of assignments – and thus the value of particular assignments – as the course progresses; however, I will **not** add assignments, but will only at most delete some (if at all).

## Grading Policies

1. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS: these must all be written in English that is *clear enough to allow me to be sure you know what you are talking about*. Thus, you should write in *complete sentences* and *coherent paragraphs* and make sure your writing is free from mechanical errors. Papers are graded primarily on content, but matters of style, diction, organization, and grammar count towards the grade, especially where errors and/or lapses interfere with the clear presentation of your ideas. Papers unacceptable due solely to poor writing *may be rewritten* (the two versions being averaged to yield the ultimate grade). Where possible, you should feel free to turn in preliminary drafts (well before the due date) so that I can make suggestions on your writing.

2. POINTS ASSIGNED: All assignments are given a number of points out of a total of 1000 that they are worth, commensurate with their percentage towards the final grade (thus a 5% assignment is worth 50 points, a 30% assignment is worth 300, and so on). The larger assignments have points assigned to subparts (e.g. the class presentation for the adopt-a-language assignment is worth 150 points and the written report on the assignment is worth 150). For the most part, each assignment is given with very specific guidelines spelled out regarding what needs to be done and how the accomplishment and execution of the requirements contributes to the grade for the assignment; points are assigned in each category of requirement and added up to give the total grade. The final grade is based on the total points earned, with point totals corresponding to letter grades as follows:

930 - 1000 = A	730 - 769 = C
900 - 929 = A-	700 - 729 = C-
870 - 899 = B+	670 - 699 = D+
830 - 869 = B	600 - 669 = D
800 - 829 = B-	0 - 599 = E
770 - 799 = C+	

3. FURTHER ON ASSIGNMENTS, MISCELLANEOUS:

- ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE DONE AND TURNED IN, ON TIME, via Carmen as an upload of an electronic document or as entered into a textbox; the due date and time are indicated on the assignment as given in Carmen.
- Late assignments automatically lose credit, though turning in a paper late is preferable to not turning it in at all, as a missing paper receives a zero. Papers more than two weeks late will **not** be accepted, however.
- Collaboration with classmates on individual assignments is perfectly acceptable, as far as discussing strategies and concepts is concerned -- often two (or more) can learn far more about an assignment by discussing it together. However, any work you turn in must ultimately be defensible as your own effort and yours alone. Any work suspected of not adhering to this ethical standard will be referred to appropriate University disciplinary committees. Those assignments that are designed for small groups (the debate especially but some groups are permissible for the adopt-a-language assignment) of course permit

sharing of ideas and to the extent that the final product is a group effort, the grade will reflect the overall group success but also individual contributions to the product (e.g. the individual presentations during the debate).

**Academic misconduct and plagiarism:**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). See the Code of Student Conduct: <https://trustees.osu.edu/rules/code-of-student-conduct/3335-23-04.html>

**Disability:**

The university strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. In light of the current pandemic, students seeking to request COVID-related accommodations may do so through the university’s [request process](#), managed by Student Life Disability Services. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. **SLDS contact information:** [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu); 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

This course is organized around 12 topics, roughly one per week for a semester but some are intended to be covered in just one class session while others require more time. These topics focus on different aspects of the various linguistic dimensions of migration, mobility, and immobility. The final week of the semester is devoted to student presentations on an endangered language that they have “adopted” and that they research as an on-going assignment throughout the semester with regard to the topics we cover week by week.

**TOPIC 1:** Introductory linguistic concepts

- Language and social groups, language and individual identity
- What counts as a language, the relationship between languages and dialects (and how linguists think about this distinction)
- How many languages there are in the world and why it is hard to count them

**Census assignment: Language inventory of the US****TOPIC 2:** Migration as a cause of endangered languages

- Distribution of speakers among languages (most languages are endangered!), who counts as a speaker of a language, and geographic distribution of languages and their speakers
- Environmental, economic, political, and social reasons for migration (with special focus on migrations within Europe and from Europe into the Americas, Africa, and parts of Asia) and the effects these movements of people have had on indigenous populations from a linguistic standpoint
- Language endangerment criteria (UNESCO, Fishman’s GIDS scale)

**Endangerment criteria assignment: critically assess differences in UNESCO criteria for endangerment compared with other sets of criteria, e.g. Fishman’s GIDS scale****TOPIC 3:** Language contact, part 1

- Causes of contact between speakers of different languages -- migration, colonization, conquest
- Consequences of contact between speakers of different languages -- bilingualism, borrowing, code-switching, language collision, language coexistence, language endangerment/language dormancy

**Language borrowing assignment: Tolkien and writing with native Germanic words versus writing with Latinate (etc.) vocabulary (showing motivation for and results of borrowing in language contact)**

**TOPIC 4:** More consequences of language contact

- Linguistic minority status – what does it mean to be a linguistic minority?
- Relation between minority status and migration -- minority immigrant communities. How migrations create pockets of new immigrant linguistic minorities and threats to language vitality and likely ultimate language loss
- Relation between minority status and immobility -- post-colonization indigenous minorities. How migrations create pockets of linguistic minorities from pre-existing and/or indigenous groups

**TOPIC 5:** Minorities in our midst, part 1

- The experience of refugees adapting to new surroundings
- Differences between relocation and forced relocation and the different linguistic outcomes that result
- How social and/or economic immobility leads to language endangerment through group shift to more economically advantageous languages
- The ideology, values, and beliefs of speakers of majority languages with regard to the use of minority languages and dialects -- is assimilation a positive goal or a destructive force? Language use as a human right?
- Language diversity in Columbus -- causes and effects

**Local Follow-up to Census assignment: Language inventory in Columbus**

**TOPIC 6:** Minorities in our midst, part 2

- American Sign Language and the Deaf community -- how contact with majority spoken language groups parallels – or not – minorities caused by forced or voluntary migrations

**Deaf film assignment (“Sound and Fury: The Communication Wars of the Deaf”)**

**TOPIC 7:** Minorities in our midst, part 3

- Indigenous minority experiences -- how contact with majority groups parallels – or not – minorities caused by forced or voluntary migrations
- American Indian languages in the USA (including languages of historical Ohio)
- Global parallels – Aboriginal languages in Australia

**Aboriginal experience film (“Rabbit-proof fence”) assignment**

**TOPIC 8:** Historical perspectives

- Language endangerment and language death through the ages

**TOPIC 9:** What is to be done: documentation/fieldwork and language revitalization and reclamation

- Showing of "Vanishing Voices" film (on devising literacy programs as part of revitalization efforts)
- Ways in which more sedentary populations – the Saami of the Nordic countries and the Basque of France (as opposed to Spain) – have fared with regard to language preservation

**Fieldwork simulation assignment**

**TOPIC 10:** Politics and ideology of language endangerment and linguistic minorities

- Economics of multilingualism – the EU experience and consequences of intra-EU mobility

**TOPIC 11:** Other consequences of migration

- Birth of new languages from language contact (esp. under colonialism) -- pidgins and creoles
- New dialects and dialect split

**TOPIC 12:** What we learn from endangered languages about language in general, about the relation of speech communities to their environment, about ourselves

- Review and synthesis of linguistic issues raised by mobility, migration, and immobility, as viewed through the eyes of different affected parties and different scholars (linguists, anthropologists, economists, film makers, and others)

**Adopt-a-language presentations**

**Final exam: Debates on controversial issues pertaining to the politics, attitudes, and ideology of language endangerment (e.g. the pros and cons of assimilation, of cultural and linguistic maintenance, of ties to the homeland (if appropriate), and the like).**