

Boston University College of Arts and Sciences

CAS LX 391/GRS LX 691: Linguistic Field Methods--Spring 2018

Time: MWF 9:05-9:55

Professor: Neil Myler

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Room B08

Location: MCS B25

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Office hours: W 11.30am-1pm; R 4-5.30pm
or by appointment

Course website: Blackboard Learn

Course objectives:

As it has become increasingly clear that the vast majority of the world's languages are threatened or endangered, more linguists have turned their attention to documenting and analyzing the many languages that are understudied. Our lack of knowledge about the grammars and lexicons of the world's extant languages places limits on our ability to theorize about the human language capacity.

How does one begin the study of an understudied language, or a language where there are no extant descriptions at all? In this class, students will work with a native speaker of such a language to learn how to undertake this process of description, analysis, and documentation. Students will learn how to plan and conduct elicitations of linguistic data, how to organize that data in electronic and paper form, and how to pursue research based on published literature combined with fieldwork. As well as working as a team to investigate the language throughout the semester, individual students produce their own final research projects on any aspect of the language they desire.

Prerequisites for the course:

CAS LX 250 Introduction to Linguistics (or equivalent), or permission of the instructor.

Students completing the course will learn:

- How to work with a native speaker to elicit linguistic data of various sorts
- To plan elicitation sessions around specific research questions, constructing hypotheses and devising various ways of testing them in elicitation
- To function as part of a research team working towards a common goal, supporting colleagues and promptly performing tasks delegated to them by the group
- To use a range of useful hardware and software to document and analyze real linguistic data
- How to produce a research paper based on fieldwork, going from data, to analysis, to writing up.

Course Structure:

This course divides into three phases. While there is some documentation of the language we are looking at, we will deliberately not look at these resources until **Phase 3** (and yes, that includes me!). This is so that we get a sense of what it's like beginning on a language from scratch. To use a metaphor inspired by video games: we're going to start by playing on the highest difficulty setting. Then, when we reach Week 6, we'll open up the strategy guide.

Phase 1: *Weeks 1-3*

During this phase we will learn about the basics of carrying out linguistic fieldwork (including how to transcribe an elicitation session, which will be your first assignment), and we will make our first baby steps in understanding how our language for the semester works. This semester, we will be looking at the **Bantu** language **Swahili**, with the help of our consultant **Mary Omari**, a native speaker from **Tanzania**.

Phase 2: *Weeks 4-6*

During this phase we will consolidate and extend our data so far with a view to figuring out the basics of our language's phonology. This phase culminates with you all submitting your second assignment—a phonological sketch of the language based only on the data we have collected for the class. We will discuss our sketches in a meeting at the beginning of Week 7, after which we will proceed to Phase 3.

Phase 3: *Weeks 7-15*

The final phase takes up just over half of the semester. From this point, we are allowed to consult pre-existing resources for our language. In addition, students will start having one-on-one meetings with the consultant, outside of the main class sessions (you may have a total of 4 one-hour meetings each, arranged at the convenience of you and the consultant). From this point on, students should start thinking about what their final project topics will be if they haven't already, and must submit a written-up proposal by the Monday of Week 9. This phase culminates with student presentations on their final projects-in-progress in Weeks 14 and 15, followed by a celebratory team meal!

Required Reading:

There is no required textbook for this course. Instead, I will post scanned excerpts from a range of sources to the Blackboard Learn site. A number of these will come from the following excellent books on linguistic field techniques. If you are interested in pursuing fieldwork in the future, you may want to get a personal copy of one or more of them, but this is not required for the purposes of this course.

- Bownen, Claire. 2015. *Linguistic Fieldwork: A Practical Guide* (2nd edition). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vaux, Bert, J. Cooper, and E. Tucker. 2007. *Linguistic Field Methods*. Wipf and Stock Pub.

- Bochnak, Ryan, and Lisa Matthewson (eds.). 2015. *Methodologies in Semantic Fieldwork*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

While you will not be “examined” on the readings in any direct way, we will discuss them to some extent in our weekly research group meetings. More importantly, though, the team as a whole will be much more successful this semester if everyone in it is ready to apply the skills derived from the readings in class and on assignments when called upon.

Once we get into Phase 3, I will upload various existing pieces of literature on our language, as and when I or other members of the team find them. I may choose to assign portions of such literature to the whole group as compulsory reading if it turns out to be useful, in which case I will update the syllabus. As we start to think about your final projects, I will recommend readings relevant for specific projects to individual (groups of) students.

Keep an eye on the syllabus to see what you should be reading each week. Any updates to the syllabus will be announced to the whole class by email.

Required Equipment:

Everyone will need:

- A notebook (an actual physical one with paper and everything) for fieldnotes
- Pencils and/or ball-point pens
- Access to a computer

The instructor will provide recording equipment for class and small-group elicitation sessions.

Course Requirements and grading:

- Class participation, including job completion (25%)
- Assignment Average (25%)
- Presentation based on final-project-in-progress (20%)
- Final project (30%)

As you can see, Class Participation counts for considerably more than it usually does in other classes. This is because our success hinges on how well we work together as a team, and that means everyone turning up, pulling their weight, and participating as much as possible. During the semester, various jobs connected to our elicitation sessions will rotate around the class—see Classroom Procedures for more information. All of us will be relying on each other to carry out our assigned jobs, so part of your participation grade will come from how dependable you are as a colleague when it comes to these rotating tasks. Another part will come from your level of participation in brainstorming sessions, and the quality and thoughtfulness of the questions and comments you contribute in the Blackboard Learn forums (see below).

There will be three main Assignments for students taking the course at the 300 level, and an additional assignment for those taking it at the 600 level. All assignments should be written on a word processor, printed, and brought to class on the day they are due.

All phonetic symbols should be written in the International Phonetic Alphabet:

<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ipa/ipachart.html>.

You can download SIL (Unicode) fonts for free from:

<http://scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts>

We will use the Leipzig Glossing Conventions in our fieldnotes. A copy of these can be found on Blackboard.

Assignment 1

Due: on Monday of Week 3 (**Monday, January 29th**)

Produce a transcript of our first elicitation session.

Assignment 2

Due: on Tuesday of Week 6 (**Tuesday, February 20th (a BU Monday)**)

Length: No more than 10 pages single spaced.

Produce a phonological sketch of the language (including phoneme inventory, segmental and suprasegmental processes, and syllable types), based only on the data we have collected in class. I'm not looking for you to get the "right" answers here (remember that I don't know what those are either!), but for you to make the best use of the data we have access to.

Assignment 3

Due: on Monday of Week 9 (**Monday, March 19th**)

Length: No more than 10 pages single spaced, no fewer than 2 pages 1.5 spaced.

This assignment will be a final project proposal. Your proposal should state what topic you intend to work on for your final project, give a summary of the data relevant to this topic which are available so far, and one or more hypotheses about how to analyze the phenomena (if your project is such that it's natural for it to have hypotheses). If you struggle to come up with a topic yourself, there will be a list of topics you can choose from in discussion with me. The concluding section should summarize how you intend to use your remaining time with the native speaker (at board during class and in small-group sessions) to best complete your project. What sort of data will you need, and how will you elicit it?

Assignment 4 (Linguistics Graduate Students Only)

Due: on Monday of Week 11 (**Monday, April 2nd**)

Produce a 5-20 page (1.5 spaced) literature review on the general phenomenon you have chosen to work on. This shouldn't be about Swahili, but rather the phenomenon in question more generally. For example, if you are looking at wh-questions in Swahili,

your review could survey relevant typological, theoretical, and/or experimental literature on wh-questions cross-linguistically.

For the Final project, students produce a 10-20 page paper (1.5 spaced) studying some aspect of the language (the topic may be created by the student or chosen from a list provided by me). Students give a 10-minute Presentation based on their final-project-in-progress in Weeks 13 and 14. The final project itself should be submitted in pdf form by email by **Noon on Sunday, May 6th**.

Collaboration on Final Projects: In principle, I am open to people working on a final project in a small group rather than individually, so long as the chosen topic seems like a big enough job to definitely need more than one person, and it seems to me that the labor will be divided amongst collaborators profitably and fairly. If you wish to do this, please make an appointment to meet with me as a group **before Spring Break**. As well as producing a single joint final project, such groups will also produce a single joint final project proposal for Assignment 3. However, each grad student in the group will be expected to research and write up their own literature review for Assignment 4.

Additional Final Project Requirements for Grad Students: Starting from week 8, graduate students will begin to meet with me once a week to discuss their final projects with me. In addition, **all graduate students must submit separate from their final project an LSA-style 500-word conference abstract based on it. In the case of group final projects, each grad student should write up their own version of this abstract.**

Course policies:

Copyright. All materials used in this course are copyrighted. This is obvious in the case of the readings, **but it also holds of my lecture slides, exercises, and other materials.** Reproducing class materials, or uploading them to websites, is a copyright infringement.

Completed assignments are to be printed out and turned in at the beginning of the class on the day of the deadline, with the exception of the final project. Email submission is not permitted unless you are unable to attend class for some valid reason.

Late assignments are not accepted, except under relevant extenuating circumstances.

Please let me know of any unavoidable absences, whether for religious, personal, or health reasons, as soon as you become aware of them. If you know you will be observing one or more religious holidays this semester, please examine the syllabus to determine which class days you will need to miss, and let me know by email as soon as possible. I will work with you to help you catch up on missed work, in accordance with BU's policy on religious absences:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/>

Procedures. Class days on Wednesday and Friday will be devoted to working with our native speaker for the semester, **Mary Omari**. On Monday class, we will have our

weekly research group meeting. Here, we will discuss certain aspects of the weekly readings, take stock of what we have learned, brainstorm about how best to use our time with the speaker during the week, and discuss how to overcome any analytical or logistical problems we face (there will be many). Occasionally, I will use the Monday meeting to train you to use a piece of equipment, piece of software, or fieldwork technique.

The Job Rota.

In each of our Wednesday and Friday elicitation sessions, there will be three jobs that need doing. These jobs will rotate amongst all of us throughout the semester, in accordance with a job rota we will agree on by the end of the first research group meeting. Once the rota is established, it is your responsibility to do your job on your assigned days. If you are ill or discover you can't attend class when you have a job, **it is your responsibility to find someone else to cover your shift by emailing a colleague ahead of time, and to cover their shift in return.** Don't let your fellow team-mates down!

The three jobs are listed below, along with a description of the duties associated with each one.

Linguist at board

This is the person who leads the session, asking the speaker questions and transcribing the answers on the board for the whole group to see.

It's tough being at board—you have to transcribe “live” in front of people, you have to plan very carefully beforehand what to ask about and how to ask it, and you have to be able to think fast when things don't come out how you were expecting (which will be all the time).

But it's also in many ways the best job of them all—the linguist at board runs the show. S/he gets to decide what to investigate that day, and which questions to ask in the process. For the first two weeks I will be the linguist at board, and after that this job will start to rotate around the rest of the team. When it's your turn to be at board, I highly recommend meeting with me (in an appointment or office hours) a day or two before your turn to discuss your session plan.

Recorder

This is in some ways the easiest job, but do it wrong and all our efforts that day might go down the drain. The recorder makes sure the microphone is in place and working properly, ensuring that the whole class session is recorded onto an SD card. I will then upload the recording to Blackboard as a sound file (with appropriate metadata). The equipment we use is highly sensitive and powerful, but the recorder must monitor it continually throughout the session to ensure that everything is working optimally.

Transcriber

Whereas the linguist at board has to do a lot of work before and during class, the transcriber has to do a lot of work during and after it. During the class, the transcriber writes down everything that the linguist at board puts on the board. Subsequently, s/he types it up, reorganizing the data to make it maximally useful, and adding appropriate metadata and annotations. The resulting document is sent to me to be uploaded as a pdf to Blackboard, in the same folder as the recording that goes with it. If you are transcriber, you should try to send your transcription to me as fast as possible after the session—the sooner we get it uploaded, the sooner the team will be able to make use of it. Certainly never take longer than seven days after your session to send it in.

The role of transcriber is very important: how well the transcriber does on a particular occasion will determine how usable the data are for all future users. To ensure that everyone gets the hang of this job right away, everyone will act as transcriber for our first in-class elicitation session, and turning that transcription in will be your first assignment.

Weekly Brainstorming Forums.

To a large extent, what we investigate this semester will depend on where our interests take us. How successful we are depends on how effectively the team works together to solve problems. To help us make the most of our Monday Research Group Meetings, we will maintain a forum each week on the Blackboard Learn site. Everyone must post at least once to the forum for each week by 7am on Monday morning. You may either (i) post a question or problem you would like to discuss at the meeting and possibly investigate in elicitation sessions that week; (ii) post a comment or question on the readings from that week, or (iii) post a response to someone else's question/comment (for example, if you think we already have data which bears on it, or you can think of some good tests which could be used to investigate it). There will be time set aside at each meeting to discuss what came up in the forum. For the first forum, make a post telling the group what you're most excited to find out about Swahili this semester.

Classroom etiquette. Cell phones should be put away in silent mode as soon as class starts, and not used during the session. The only people allowed to use laptops in class are the transcriber for that day and the instructor— everyone else must use notebooks (the transcriber may use a notebook instead, of course, if s/he prefers; this is what I will do when I am transcriber).

There will be no extra credit in this course.

Academic Integrity. All undergraduate students are responsible for understanding and complying with the BU Academic Conduct Code, available at:
<https://www.bu.edu/cas/current-students/undergraduate/academic-conduct-code-2/>

Graduate students should instead consult the GRS Academic and Professional Conduct Code: <https://www.bu.edu/cas/files/2017/02/GRS-Academic-Conduct-Code-Final.pdf>

Collaboration. If you decide to form a study group to work together on assignments, your collaboration should not go beyond discussing ideas together. In other words, **you must write up your own assignment separately from the group, using only your own words** (except when quoting other work directly, in which case use citations as standard). The only exception to this is if you have been pre-approved to work on Assignment 3 and the Final Project as a group.

[Remember: for groups including grad students, I will expect each grad student to complete Assignment 4 individually—you can then pool the insights from your literature reviews with the rest of the group.]

The following are all **banned forms of collaboration** (except for pre-approved group final projects):

- Having one or more members of the group produce a “group draft”, or “group essay plan”, which individual members of the group then customize.
- Writing up on separate computers while conferring with each other in real time (whether in person or via skype, chat services, or any other medium).
- Using another student’s complete assignment as a reference when completing your own.

Grading standards:

93-100	A	78-79.99	C+
90-92.99	A-	73-77.99	C
88-89.99	B+	70-72.99	C-
83-87.99	B	60-69.99	D
80-82.99	B-	<60	F

Course Overview (subject to change- any updates will be posted to Blackboard)

Week	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
Dates			
Week 1 Friday, Jan 19	Introduction <i>Class logistics</i> <i>Getting to know each other</i> <i>Preliminary job rota</i> <i>(including recorders for next</i> <i>week and transcriber for</i> <i>Friday)</i>		

Week 2 Monday, Jan 22	1st Research Group Meeting <i>Finalize job rota;</i> <i>Tutorial on metadata</i>	Bowern Ch 1, 4, & 11	
Wednesday, Jan 24	Introduction to Swahili with Mary Omari <i>Instructor at board; everyone transcribing</i>		
Friday, Jan 27	In-class elicitation		
Week 3 Monday, Jan 29	2nd Research Group Meeting <i>Discussion of transcription issues so far;</i> <i>Tutorial on glossing</i>	Matthewson (2004); Bowern Ch 3	Assignment 1 Due (Transcription of 1 st elicitation session)
Wednesday, Jan 31	In-class elicitation		
Friday, Feb 2	In-class elicitation		
Week 4 Monday, Feb 5	3rd Research Group Meeting <i>Organizing tutorials on Praat</i>	Bowern Ch 5	
Wednesday, Feb 7	In-class elicitation		
Friday, Feb 9	In-class elicitation		
Week 5 Monday, Feb 12	4th Research Group Meeting <i>Brainstorming further issues to investigate for phonological sketches</i>	Bowern Ch 6 [Optional: <i>VCT morphology chapter</i>]	
Wednesday, Feb 14	In-class elicitation		
Friday, Feb 16	In-class elicitation		
Week 6 Monday, Feb 19	President's Day Holiday		
Tuesday, Feb 20	5th Research Group Meeting <i>Quick guide to pre-existing resources on our language</i>	Bowern Ch 7 [Optional: <i>VCT syntax chapter</i>]	Assignment 2 Due (Phonological Sketch)
Wednesday, Feb 21	In-class elicitation		

Friday, Feb 23	In-class elicitation		
Week 7 Monday, Feb 26	6th Research Group Meeting <i>Discussion of phonological sketches vs. Standard descriptions</i>	Bowern Ch 13	
Wednesday, Feb 28	In-class elicitation		
Friday, March 2	In-class elicitation		
Monday, March 5	SPRING BREAK		
Wednesday, March 7	SPRING BREAK		
Friday, March 9	SPRING BREAK		
Week 8 Monday, March 12	7th Research Group Meeting	Bohnemeyer (2015)	
Wednesday, March 14	In-class elicitation		
Friday, March 16	In-class elicitation		
Week 9 Monday, March 19	8th Research Group Meeting	Bowern Ch 9; Louie (2015)	Assignment 3 Due (Final Project Proposal)
Wednesday, March 21	In-class elicitation		
Friday, March 23	In-class elicitation		
Week 10 Monday, March 26	9th Research Group Meeting		
Wednesday, March 28	In-class elicitation		
Friday, March 30	In-class elicitation		
Week 11 Monday, April 2	10th Research Group Meeting		Graduate Students' Assignment 4 Due (lit review)
Wednesday, April 4	In-class elicitation		

Friday, April 6	In-class elicitation		
Week 12 Monday, April 9	11th Research Group Meeting		
Wednesday, April 11	In-class elicitation		
Friday, April 13	In-class elicitation		
Week 13 Monday, April 16	12th Research Group Meeting <i>Logistics for presentations</i>		
Wednesday, April 18	In-class elicitation		
Friday, April 20	In-class elicitation		
Week 14 Monday, April 23	Class Presentations		
Wednesday, April 25			
Friday, April 27			
Week 15 Monday, April 30	Class Presentations		
Wednesday, May 2			

Team Meal: Friday, May 4th

Final Project Due: Noon Sunday, May 6th (by email, in pdf form)

Course Bibliography

Bochnak, Ryan, and Lisa Matthewson (eds.). 2015. *Methodologies in Semantic Fieldwork*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bohnemeyer, Jürgen. 2015. A Practical Epistemology for Semantic Elicitation in the Field and Elsewhere. In Bochnak, Ryan, and Lisa Matthewson (eds.). 2015. *Methodologies in Semantic Fieldwork*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 13-46.

Bowern, Claire. 2015. *Linguistic Fieldwork: A Practical Guide* (2nd Edition). Palgrave Macmillan.

Louie, Meagan. 2015. The Problem for No-Nonsense Elicitation Plans (for Semantic Fieldwork). In Bochnak, Ryan, and Lisa Matthewson (eds.). 2015. *Methodologies in Semantic Fieldwork*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 47-71.

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Matthewson, Lisa. 2004. On the Methodology of Semantic Fieldwork. *IJAL* 70.4:369-415.

Vaux, Bert, J. Cooper, and E. Tucker. 2007. *Linguistic Field Methods*. Wipf and Stock Pub.