LING 499-Special Topics, Atayal Language and Culture
Summer 2012
Khalil Iskarous

Time: M/T/Th/F 10:00-12:00
Place: National Tsing Hua University Classroom
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Description and Goals: The goal of this course will be to learn about the language and culture of the endangered Austronesian language Atayal, spoken in Taiwan. A major global problem of the last 200 years is a very high language death rate. And when languages and cultures die, an important part of our human heritage and culture are lost. This is especially the case when the languages and cultures lost could have taught us an enormous amount about the human mind and human society. This is true in many cases, but is especially true of the Formosan languages of Taiwan, the ancestral source of Austronesian culture and language that spread from Madagascar in the west to Easter Island and Hawaii in the East. This “problems-without-passports” course will preserve part of the language and culture of the Atayal. A joint project of all the students in the course will be to document the Atayal Language in an innovative way, in the process of learning about the language and the culture.

The course does not have prerequisites. The first two weeks of the course will take place at USC, in which students will learn the basics of linguistic analysis and language documentation, as well as what is currently known about the language. We will also watch a few films in Austronesian languages to start immersing ourselves in cultures related to the one to be documented. In Taiwan (4 weeks), lectures will be presented three times a week, and meetings with the native speakers will also take place on 2-3 days. Students will interview and record the speakers as they tell stories or converse about their daily lives and about their culture. Students will also learn how to label and parse the narratives collected into an internet database record of the language. Each student will be responsible for a different topic relating to the lives of the speakers, that is possibly of interest to the student, so that the lexicon and linguistic record will cover a variety of aspects of daily life. The lectures will be about history, culture, and language of the Atayal. The last week of the course will be at USC to wrap up the collective language-documentation project, consisting of a lexicon and a set of conversations/stories. Through the course, the students will have learnt about an important part of human culture, and will have played an important role in establishing a record of the language that could be used by scientists or by descendants of the speakers, who may one day want to learn the language and culture of the Atayal.

Students will register for LING 499-Special Topics (4 units). The course is open for all students with a minimum GPA of 3.0. Program Dates: May 16-July 6.
Requirements:

• Homework assignments (Documentation and Reading) (60%)
• A short term paper about language and/or culture of Atayal (25%)
  – Select topic and meet with me by June 15
  – Paper presentation in class
  – Paper due on date of Final Exam
• Class and field work participation (15%)

Homework: The HW will consist of two parts: 1) readings that provide background on what is known about the Atayal language and culture, as well as techniques of language documentation; 2) language documentation work, where students will interview the speakers, with the assistance of a translator, and then translate, label, and enter the linguistic data in a database. Each student will be expected to read the material assigned, but students are encouraged to discuss the readings before class. The language documentation is expected to be performed jointly by all the students, but each student will be primarily responsible for one aspect of the culture (e.g., plants, cooking, sailing, cultural history, art, domestic life, trade, kinship, etc.). And the evaluation of the student will be on the collection of data regarding that aspect of the culture. Students will be allowed to change their topic, if they have already collected enough data regarding it, or if it proves to be difficult to discuss the issue with the speakers.

Paper: Each student will write a short 5-7 page paper about some aspect of the language/culture of interest to them. Students can discuss the topic with each other, but the writing of each paper has to be done by the student without help from others. Students will present their papers in the last week of the course at USC.

Students with Disabilities: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776. Their website is http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html

Statement of Academic Integrity: USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:
http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/
Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community
Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at:
http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/
Class Schedule

1. **Week 1 at USC**: Introduction to the study of Language and the history of the Austronesian languages.
   a. What is a grammatical description of a language?
   c. Variation and language use.
   d. Interview Skills and IRB issues
   e. Watching 3 films

2. **Week 2 at USC**: Endangered Languages, and field work. The sounds and grammar of Formosan languages.
   a. Sounds and Grammar of Atayal Dialects
   b. Field work
   c. Culture and Language
   d. Using Praat to label acoustic signals
   e. Ultrasound analysis
   f. Working with an internet database for the lexicon and narratives
   g. Discussion of the communal project and planned individual contributions

3. **Week 3 in Taiwan**: Language Documentation
   a. Readings on what it takes to preserve aspects of a language
   b. Interview techniques 2
   c. Documentation Goals
   d. Documentation 1: stories
   e. Focus and Prosody

4. **Week 4 in Taiwan**: Let’s speak Atayal
   a. Documentation goal 2: ultrasound
   b. Syntactic issues in Formosan
   c. Phonological issues in Formosan
   d. Austronesian culture and religion

5. **Week 5 in Taiwan**:
   a. Writing a coherent grammatical description of the language 1
   b. Design of the Lexicon 1
   c. 10 narratives/conversations and labeling
   d. Labeling the narratives/conversations
   e. History of the Austronesian Peoples 1

6. **Week 6 in Taiwan**:
   a. Writing a coherent grammatical description of the language 2
   b. 10 narratives/conversations & labeling
   c. Labeling the narratives/conversations
   d. History of the Austronesian Peoples 2

7. **Week 7 at USC**:
   a. Writing a coherent grammatical description of the languages 3
   b. Polishing touches on the communal project and discussion of individual contributions.
Readings


**Housing:** The students will live in a dormitory at National Tsing Hua University (NTHU). The Dean of the Office of International Affairs at NTHU has proposed this arrangement. The native speakers of Atayal will also relocate to live near the NTHU for the month of June. Students will be accompanied by Professor Iskarous for the entire course.

**Student Services:** The students will register for the course at USC. In Taiwan, the instructor, Prof. Khalil Iskarous, will address any personal concerns.

**Excursions:** The only planned excursion is to Taipei for 2 days of the 19th Annual Meeting of the Austronesian Formal Linguistics Association, which coincides with the last few days of the portion of the course in Taiwan. This will be an occasion for students to meet the world's leading experts on Austronesian Linguistics.

**Library & Computer Facilities:** Students will have access to the Library and computer facilities at NTHU.

**Health Facilities:** NTHU is in the large city of Hsinchu, which has three hospitals: Hsin-chu Hospital, Mackay Memorial Hospital, and Cathay General Hospital.

**Contact with local Students:** By living in the dormitory, students will be expected to have regular contact with local students.

**Accessibility:** NTHU will be asked to provide an accessible classroom and accessible dormitory facilities.

**Number of Students:** The course will have a maximum number of 10 students, so as not to overwhelm the native speakers.

**Target Audience:** This course will be most successful if students from a variety of majors register. Since each student will be responsible for documenting one aspect of the culture, it would be beneficial if the student is knowledgeable about that topic, based on her/his major.

**Admission Requirements:**
1. No language requirement, but it would be useful if the student has previously learnt a foreign language.
2. It is hoped that students from a wide variety of majors register.
3. GPA: minimum GPA is 3.0.
4. No other courses are required.
5. Procedure for selecting participants: interview with Prof. Iskarous.