Linguistics 499: Endangered Language Documentation  
Units: 4 units  
Summer 2018

Faculty Accompanying Students: Professor Khalil Iskarous, Associate Prof. in Linguistics  
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Office Hours: TBA

Course Description: This course focuses on a central problem in human culture: the fast disappearance of the majority of the world’s language families. And when languages die, the cultures and social structures transmitted through these languages, usually die as well. This course, part of the Problems without Borders program of the Dornsife College of Arts, Letters and Sciences, allows students to observe and participate in a world-wide project to document endangered languages. Communities throughout the world, sometimes with the help of linguists and anthropologists, have been recording their languages in various forms, so that later generations have access to their culture and history. In this course, we will travel to the Alps, where the language Ladin, an endangered descendent of Vulgar Latin, survives with a few thousand speakers (this may sound like a lot, but consider that this is a fraction of the USC student body) to document this language. Our work will consist of soliciting conversations between speakers of the language, recording these conversations, and performing an initial linguistic and computational analysis, at various levels, of this data. One innovative aspect of this project is that we will be comparing traditional linguistic analysis of the data and the results of machine learning computational analysis of that same data. The reason for this step is that languages are dying at such a high rate that traditional analysis methods are too slow to be likely to document a significant number of languages. If computational tools which have revolutionized speech and language technology in the past few years can be proven to be useful analysis tools, then at least some of the documentation work can be made automatic or semi-automatic. Ladin was chosen, since some is known already about the structure of the language, which can then be compared with that derived by our linguistic analysis as well as the automatic analysis. Therefore, the work we undertake could potentially be used in the future to improve the automation of some of the work involved in documentation.

Learning Objectives: 1) Gain an understanding of the language endangerment situation in the world today; 2) Learn basic principles of phonetic, phonological, morphological, and syntactic analysis; 3) Learn some aspects of the Ladin language; 4) Learn how to interview participants, and record their linguistic output; 5) Learn how to use various computational tools for phonetic, morphological, and syntactic analysis.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course, but enrollment in a Linguistics course in the Spring of 2018, especially Linguistics 385 (Human Language as Computation), or
Linguistics 585, if the student has already taken Ling 385, and qualifies through an interview with Prof. Iskarous, would be extremely helpful. Knowledge of Italian, German, Spanish, or other Romance languages would also be of great value.

**Structure of the Course:** We will be meeting for 2 weeks at USC, every day for 4 hours, before traveling to Bolzano, where the program will be centered. We will be collecting data in the Dolomite Valleys 2-3 days a week, and will spend 1-2 days analyzing and discussing the data. I will also be giving regular lectures on techniques we will be using, and about what we are learning about the language. In addition, we will have regular lectures by experts on the culture, history, and politics of the region. Friday-Sunday will be off, except when a speaker is unable to give a lecture on the other days.

**Course Requirement and grades:**

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final project</td>
<td>50%</td>
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**Participation:** This will be judged through practical participation in the recording and analysis of data.

**Final Project:** Each student will be responsible for recording one 10 minute (or so) conversation or monologue, and will do as much as possible in translating and analyzing the passage. The student will also write a 5-10 page discussion of the quality of the results of computational analysis, offering some ideas on especially problematic aspects and potential improvements. The projects and essay will be judged based on the extent of knowledge of the language discussed in class.

**Lodging and Transportation:** The course will take place at the University of Bolzano, and students will stay in a Hostel in the city of Bolzano. The hostel will be paid for by the student, but arrangements for which hostel will be made by Prof. Iskarous. We will travel to the two main valleys where the Ladin language is spoken 2-3 times a week. Transportation costs to the valleys will be paid by the program, if a bus is rented, but will be paid for by the student, if public transportation is taken. Food will be bought by the student.

**Cost:** 1. Tuition: Approximately $6000; 2. Airline Ticket: Approximately $1500; Lodging: Approximately $600; Food: Approximately $500.

**Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/](https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *Campus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).
Support Systems:
Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/]

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org]

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/]

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [http://sarc.usc.edu/]

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [https://equity.usc.edu/]

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/]

The Office of Disability Services and Programs
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [http://dsp.usc.edu]

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/]

Diversity at USC
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [https://diversity.usc.edu/]

USC Emergency Information
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, [http://emergency.usc.edu]

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.
Provides overall safety to USC community. [http://dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-19 May</td>
<td>USC</td>
<td>Introduction to Ladin, memorization of vocabulary, Romance sentence structure, introduction to language endangerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>22-26 May</td>
<td>USC</td>
<td>Memorization of vocabulary, Romance sentence structure, introduction to language endangerment, tutorial on using Praat</td>
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<td>29-June 1</td>
<td>University of Bolzano</td>
<td>Initial trip to Gardena or Vigo Valley, tutorial on Romance Morphology</td>
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<td>4-7 June</td>
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<td>Collection and analysis in Gardena and Vigo Vallies</td>
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<td>11-14 June</td>
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<td>18-21 June</td>
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<td>25-28 June</td>
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<td>Collection and analysis in Gardena and Vigo Vallies</td>
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<td>30 June</td>
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<td>Project Due</td>
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