

# TRA 305/HIS 310/ECS 305 (HA)

## IMAGINED LANGUAGES

**Professors Michael D. Gordin and Joshua T. Katz**  
**Spring Semester 2013**  
**Room: Aaron Burr 209**

### **Course Description:**

This course combines historical and linguistic analysis in an attempt to understand how and why people are sometimes moved to try to transcend the languages to which we have natural, or at least relatively easy, access. Among the examples we will consider are Esperanto, Klingon, Middle Egyptian, Linear A and B, Cornish, Fortran, and Proto-World. Taking a view that is broad both geographically and temporally, we will explore, in an interactive and collaborative way, the philosophical and sociological implications of constructing and reconstructing languages for purposes that range from the political to the literary to the simply frivolous.

### **Course Requirements:**

- Active participation in class (20%)
- Weekly assignments (5 out of 10: must do #1 and then any other 4) (20%)
- Group project with a partner (30%)
- Final paper (due Dean's Date: 14 May 2013) (30%)

### **The Fine Print**

You must show up on time to every class. More than one unexcused absence, including arriving more than 5 minutes late, will result in a significant penalty. You may bring appropriate electronic devices to class for the purpose of contributing to discussion; if a device starts to detract from your and everyone else's experience, we may need to revise the policy. Phones must be silenced and thou shalt not text.

Each one of the 5 weekly assignments that you complete must be submitted — in two hard copies — at the start of the class in which it is due (invariably a Monday, aside from #8). If you hand it in late, it will not count.

You must have chosen a partner for your two-person group project and informed us by e-mail of his/her name by 12 p.m. on 15 February. If you have trouble finding a partner, please let us know by 12 p.m. on 8 February. Group projects are due via Webspaces by 11:59 p.m. on 27 April; late submissions will be penalized at the rate of one-third of a letter every 6 hours. It will be assumed that both members of any group have put in the same amount of work, and the grade you receive on it will be the same as that of your partner.

Two hard copies of your final paper are due by 4:45 p.m. on Dean's Date, 14 May. Only Deans can approve extensions.

### **Required Books:**

John Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B*, 2nd ed., with a new Postscript (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1958]). [ISBN-13: 9780521398305; \$25.99]

- Andrew Drummond, *A Hand-Book of Volapük and an Elementary Manual of its Grammar and Vocabulary, prepared from the Gathered Papers of Gemmell Hunter Ibidem Justice; together with an Account of Events Relating to the Annual General Meeting of 1891 of the Edinburgh Society for the Propagation of a Universal Language* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006). [ISBN-13: 9781904598671; \$19.95]
- Stanisław Lem, *His Master's Voice*, tr. Michael Kandel (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990 [1968, 1983 translation]). [ISBN-13: 9780810117310; \$16.95]
- Mark Okrand, *The Klingon Dictionary: English/Klingon, Klingon/English*, with Addendum (New York: Pocket Books, 1992 [1985]). [ISBN-13: 9780671745592; \$15.00]
- Arika Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages: Adventures in Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010 [2009]). [ISBN-13: 9780812980899; \$16.00]
- Max Talmeý, *Practical and Theoretical Esperanto* (New York: University Language Publishing, 1906). [ISBN-13: 9780559210440 or 9780559210471; \$19.99 or \$19.75 — or whichever reprint edition you find that suits your fancy]

Other required readings, marked with a (\*), will be available as e-reserves for download from Blackboard, where some other useful material, including a list of further recommended readings, will also be made available.

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## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

#### **Meeting 1, 4 February:** Introduction: Unimagined Languages

*Readings:*

- \* John Algeo, *The Origins and Development of the English Language*, 6th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2010), 41-46. {6}
- Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages*, 19-75. {56}

#### **Meeting 2, 6 February:** Linguistic Stability, Change, and Comparison

*Readings:*

- \* Otto Jespersen, "Nature and Art in Language," in *Linguistica: Selected Papers in English, French and German* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1933): 434-53. {20}
- \* Geoffrey K. Pullum, "The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax," in *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax and other Irreverent Essays on the Study of Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 159-71. {13}

**Assignment #1 (Due Meeting 3):** Use your newly acquired knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet to write your name and a paragraph about yourself. (Unless otherwise noted, all weekly assignments are due in class the following Monday.)

## WEEK 2: PROTO-LANGUAGES

### **Meeting 3, 11 February:** The Comparative Method and Proto-Indo-European

*Readings:*

- \* Calvert Watkins, "Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans," in *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2011): vi-xxxiv (plus 148-51 and a few sample pages from the dictionary itself). {33+}

### **Meeting 4, 13 February:** From (Pre-)Proto-World to the Modern Fringe

*Readings:*

- \* Jay H. Jasanoff and Alan Nussbaum, "Word Games: The Linguistic Evidence in *Black Athena*," in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, eds., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 177-208. {32}
- \* Johanna Nichols, "Monogenesis or Polygenesis: A Single Ancestral Language for All Humanity?," in Maggie Tallerman and Kathleen R. Gibson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Language Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 558-72. {15}
- \* Richard B. Woodward, "The Man Who Loved Languages," *The American Scholar* 75, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 44-57. {14} [Available on JSTOR.org]

**Assignment #2:** Examine the image correlating migratory patterns and language families carefully. Using both Firestone and whatever other resources are at your disposal (but you *must* use Firestone!), locate and check out a scholarly volume that engages with the arguments behind this image. (Yes, you can check out volumes of journals from Firestone. And edited collections of essays are books like any other.) Write one paragraph about what you understand the nature of the engagement to be. Bring both the paragraph and the text to class. (We'll return the volume to Firestone for you.)

**BY THE END OF WEEK 2:** ALL STUDENTS MUST HAVE CHOSEN A PARTNER FOR THEIR FINAL PROJECT AND INFORMED MG & JTK OF THEIR CHOICE. IF YOU WOULD PREFER THAT WE PAIR YOU UP WITH ANOTHER CLASSMATE, YOU MUST LET US KNOW.

## WEEK 3: HERMETIC LANGUAGES

### **Meeting 5, 18 February:** Egyptian Hieroglyphs

*Readings:*

- \* Umberto Eco, "The Perfect Language of Images," in *The Search for the Perfect Language*, tr. James Fentress (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995): 144-77. {34}
- \* Richard Parkinson, "Deciphering the Rosetta Stone," in *Cracking Codes: The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 12-45 {34}

**Meeting 6, 20 February: Linear B**

*Readings:*

Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B*, entire. {ix + 164}

**Assignment #3:** Decipher the segment of code posted on Blackboard.

**WEEK 4: ESPERANTO**

**Meeting 7, 25 February: Grammar**

*Readings:*

Talmey, *Practical and Theoretical Esperanto*, 5-76. {72}

**Meeting 8, 27 February: Culture and Community**

*Readings:*

Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages*, 77-131. {55}

**Assignment #4:** Translate one of the Esperanto poems posted on Blackboard into English.

**WEEK 5: THE CHILDREN OF ESPERANTO**

**Meeting 9, 4 March: Volapük**

*Readings:*

Drummond, *A Hand-Book of Volapük*, entire. {320}

**Meeting 10, 6 March: From Ido to Interlingua (and beyond)**

**Assignment #5:** Write a poem in Volapük in the style of a poet of your choice. Add a few sentences explaining your selection.

**WEEK 6: REVIVING THE DEAD AND REVITALIZING THE DYING**

**Meeting 11, 11 March: Imagined Revivals: The Celtic Tongues**

*Readings:*

- \* Suzanne Romaine, "Revitalized Languages as Invented Languages," in Michael Adams, eds., *From Elvish to Klingon: Exploring Invented Languages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 185-225. {41}
- \* Diarmuid Ó Néill, "The Purpose of Rebuilding the Celtic Languages," in Diarmuid Ó Néill, ed., *Rebuilding the Celtic Languages: Reversing Language Shift in the Celtic Countries* (Talybont, Ceredigion: Y Lolfa Cyf, 2005): 17-32. {16}
- \* Kenneth MacKinnon, "Development of Cornish Language and Literature," in Ó Néill, ed.: 214-74 (plus samples of Cornish on pp. 211-13) {64}

**Meeting 12, 13 March:** Modernizing Antiquity: Modern Hebrew, Spoken Latin

*Readings:*

- \* George Mandel, “Why Did Ben-Yehuda Suggest the Revival of Spoken Hebrew?,” in Lewis Glinert, ed., *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 193-207. {15}
- \* Rebecca Mead, “Latin Lover,” *The New Yorker* (17 September 2001): 107-117. {11}

**BY THE END OF WEEK 6:** ALL STUDENTS MUST BY NOW HAVE MET WITH MG & JTK (BOTH OF US, AT THE SAME TIME). BEFORE THE MEETING, YOU SHOULD HAVE GIVEN THOUGHT TO WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO WRITE YOUR FINAL PAPER ON AND WHAT YOU ARE THINKING OF DOING FOR YOUR JOINT PROJECT. WE MUST GIVE OUR APPROVAL FOR BOTH.

**WEEK 7: LANGUAGE AND MIND**

**Meeting 13, 25 March:** Plato, Saussure, Chomsky, and Others

*Readings:*

- \* Pieter A. M. Seuren, *Western Linguistics: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 3-27, 140-77. {63}
- \* Noam Chomsky, Review of B. F. Skinner, *Verbal Behavior* (1957), *Language* 35 (1959): 26-58. {33}

**Meeting 14, 27 March:** Whorf and Whorfianism

*Readings:*

- \* Benjamin Lee Whorf, “Science and Linguistics,” in John B. Carroll, ed., *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956): 207-19. {13}

**Assignment #6:** Find something that promulgates an extreme Whorfian or anti-Whorfian position. Give it to us, along with your own 1-page response to the author’s argument.

**BY THE END OF WEEK 7:** EACH STUDENT MUST HAVE TURNED IN A 2-PARAGRAPH PROPOSAL FOR HIS OR HER FINAL PAPER. IN ADDITION, EACH PAIR OF STUDENTS MUST TURN IN A 2-PARAGRAPH PROPOSAL FOR THEIR FINAL PROJECT.

**WEEK 8: FANTASTIC LANGUAGES**

**Meeting 15, 1 April:** Quenya and Sindarin

*Readings:*

- \* J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 277-84, 424-28. {13}

**Meeting 16, 3 April:** Europanto et amici

*Readings:*

- \* Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963 [1962]), 3-16. {14}
- \* Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, expanded edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998 [1980]), 1-7. {8}
- \* Diego Marani, *Las Aventuras des Inspector Cabillot* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2012), 103-108. {6}

**Assignment #7:** Provide a 1-2 page explication of a single sentence of your choice from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, drawn from the page-range provided in class.

**WEEK 9: KLINGON**

**Meeting 17, 8 April:** Language

*Readings:*

- Okrand, *The Klingon Dictionary*, 9-74. {66}

**Meeting 18, 10 April:** Life-Forms

*Readings:*

- Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages*, 253-281. {29}

**Assignment #8 (NOTE: due Meeting 18, not the following Monday):** Watch some *Star Trek*. Find a passage of spoken Klingon that is at least ten words long. Memorize it, working to get the pronunciation right, and figure out what it means. Be prepared to present your assignment to the class orally.

**WEEK 10: BASIC ENGLISH**

**Meeting 19, 15 April:** Basic English as Language

*Readings:*

- \* I. A. Richards, *Basic English and Its Uses* (New York: Norton), 11-44. {34}

**Meeting 20, 17 April:** Glöblish

*Readings:*

- \* Leslie Dunton-Downer, *The English Is Coming!: How One Language is Sweeping the World* (New York: Touchstone, 2010), 198-243. {46}

**Assignment #9:** Write an account of your past 24 hours using only Basic English. Try it for about 300 words.

## WEEK 11: NON-HUMAN LANGUAGES

### **Meeting 21, 22 April:** Animal Languages?

*Readings:*

- \* Charles F. Hockett, "Animal 'Languages' and Human Language," in J. N. Spuhler, ed., *The Evolution of Man's Capacity for Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959): 32-39. {8}
- \* Thomas A. Sebeok, "Animal Communication," *Science* 147, no. 3661 (26 February 1965): 1006-1014. {9}
- \* Karl von Frisch, "Decoding the Language of the Bee," *Science* 185, no. 4152 (23 August 1974): 663-668. {6}
- \* D. Graham Burnett, "A Mind in the Water: The Dolphin as Our Beast of Burden," *Orion* (May-June 2010): 38-51. {14}

### **Meeting 22, 24 April:** Math and Computer Languages?

*Readings:*

- \* Benjamin Wardhaugh, "What Does It Say?," in *How to Read Historical Mathematics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010): 1-20. {20}

**Assignment #10:** Select one of the following two: a) Take the passage of "math" on Blackboard and write it in English prose; b) Take the passage of COBOL on Blackboard and write it in English prose.

**BY THE END OF WEEK 11:** GROUP PROJECTS ARE ***DUE***. THEY WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL STUDENTS IN THE CLASS BY THE WEEKEND.

## WEEK 12: SETI

### **Meeting 23, 29 April:** Talking with Aliens

*Readings:*

- Lem, *His Master's Voice*, entire. {199}

### **Meeting 24, 1 May:** Wrap-up

*Readings:*

Explore the other projects submitted by your classmates and be prepared to engage with them constructively.