

BA Seminar in Linguistics, 2024/2025

Instructor: Przemysław Pawelec, PhD

Describing an endangered language

The goal of this seminar is to assist students in writing their BA thesis. The topic of the thesis will be either a description of the situation of an endangered language of their choice or an analysis of a selected subsystem or a selected phenomenon of such a language.

By a common estimate, by the end of this century, ca 90% of the languages spoken today will have become extinct or almost extinct. This is a huge loss to humanity, and in the past 30 years more and more linguists have been involved in studying the problem and finding ways of slowing down or preventing the change. At the same time more and more language communities have become active in the revitalization of their native languages. The gravity of the problem has also been noticed by the general public: in 2016 the United Nations proclaimed 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages, and in December 2019, it proclaimed the whole period 2022–2032 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Also in Poland, there are both linguists and minority language activists who try to raise awareness of the situation of endangered languages and the appreciation of their value to our common heritage. The present seminar is a small contribution to this enterprise.

The course falls into two parts: in the first semester, you will learn about the phenomenon of language endangerment and the value of linguistic heritage, language documentation, and language revitalization. You will also start writing your thesis. In the second semester, you will complete your thesis.

As all BA seminars, this seminar is coupled with an Academic Writing class taught by the same instructor.

Selected readings

Nettle, Daniel & Suzanne Romaine. 2000. *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. Oxford University Press

Tsunoda, Tasaku. 2006. *Language Endangerment and Language Revitalization*. Mouton de Gruyter.

“International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022 – 2032” at

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/indigenous-languages.html>

“In Our Own Words”, description of a film festival in Poland dedicated to indigenous cultures and languages. <https://coling.al.uw.edu.pl/festival/>