Department of Linguistics  
Fall Term 2012 [1127]

LINGUISTICS 804  
Field Linguistics  

Instructor: Prof. Donna Gerdts  
Room: RCB 9224  Tel: 604-224-7203  
Email: gerdts@sfu.ca

PREREQUISITES: Graduate standing in Linguistics or Permission of the Instructor  
TIME/PLACE: Saturday 9:30–12:30 WMC 2521; 2:30–3:30 AQ 5026

COURSE CONTENT:  
Linguistics as an empirical science uses cross-linguistic evidence to develop and test theories of human language. In keeping with the goal of providing analyses of all of the world’s languages, linguists engage in fieldwork with native speakers. The Field Methods courses teaches students to elicit, transcribe, organize, and analyze linguistic data collected from a native speaker of an unfamiliar, understudied, and often unwritten language. Students meet with the native speaker in class each week, taking turns asking questions about the language. The instructor helps the students transcribe, translate, and interpret the data provided by the native speaker until the students develop sufficient skills to work with the speaker directly.

Students learn techniques to discover the grammatical structure of a language and test hypotheses about that structure, rather than on learning already established generalizations about the language, as would be typical in a language course. Students investigate the phonetic, phonological, morphological, and syntactic structure of a language, and develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of how the language operates. As the course progresses, the student will gain an understanding of the kinds of questions that will best lead to understanding the language’s structure, and how to critically evaluate statements about a language gathered from a speaker.

Students learn how to survey what has been written before on a topic and how to use previous research to design their own research questions. In addition, we will discuss the social, cultural, and individual dynamics of fieldwork situations. Students practice recording and processing audio and video data, managing databases, and producing archive quality materials.

The language addressed in our course is Hul’q’umi’num’ (the Vancouver Island dialect of Halkomelem). Hul’q’umin’um’, a Salish language, is one of the thirty-seven First Nations languages of British Columbia. Our native speaker consultant is Eugene Harry, a member of the Malahat First Nation, who lives in North Vancouver and works as an elementary language and cultural teacher. Mr. Harry is also well-known as a public speaker at cultural and religious events.

READING: various books and papers on reserve at SFU Library

COURSE GRADING:  
Participation: 20%  Problems: 30%  Final Paper: 50%

Students should familiarize themselves with the Department's Standards on Class Management and Student Responsibilities at http://www.sfu.ca/linguistics/undergraduate/standards.html.

Please note that a grade of “FD” may be assigned as a penalty for academic dishonesty.

All student requests for accommodations for their religious practices must be made in writing by the end of the first week of classes or no later than one week after a student adds a course.

Students requiring accommodations as a result of a disability must contact the Centre for Students with Disabilities (778-782-3112 or csdo@sfu.ca).