

24.909 Field Methods in Linguistics

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Fall 2023

Instructor: Dr. Ksenia Ershova
Contact: kershova@mit.edu
Office hours: By appointment ([Calendly link](#))

Language consultant: Tia Wulansari
Contact info and meeting schedule to be distributed separately.

Canvas: <https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/22224>
Class schedule: MW 2:30–4
Location: 4-265

Description of the Course

This course focuses on the exploration of an unfamiliar language through direct work with a native speaker. The course provides a unique opportunity to gain experience with hands-on linguistic research and has two major goals: (i) providing training in fieldwork methodologies, including elicitation, transcription, data analysis and data management and (ii) gaining awareness and preparedness for the extra-linguistic aspects of fieldwork by focusing on questions of ethics, logistics, and other practical considerations when starting a new project.

This year, we will focus on documenting and analyzing the Indonesian language by working with our language consultant, Tia Wulansari.

You will leave this class with the experience of conducting a research project based on primary data, as well as the basic tools and knowledge needed to undertake further linguistic research in the field. Even if independent fieldwork is not in your immediate future, this class will provide you with a valuable set of skills for any project which deals with human cognition and requires collaboration with human subjects.

Prerequisites

24.901 and 24.902 (or permission of instructor)

Requirements

Participation-based (20%)

1. **Class participation:** attendance and participation in weekly lectures and in-class elicitations.
2. **Readings:**
 - (a) Assigned to whole class – come to class prepared to discuss.
 - (b) Assigned to student individually – use as reference in assignments related to final project.
3. **Elicitations:**
 - (a) **In-class:** students will be responsible for leading a portion of the in-class elicitation on a rotating basis.
 - (b) **Individual:** weekly one-hour meetings with Tia.

The topics/goals for elicitations in the first 3 weeks will be assigned by instructor.

After that, students will be expected to plan their elicitations based on their individual projects (independently or with the instructor's help).

Written assignments (40%)

1. **In-class elicitation plan (due Saturday 11:59PM):**

If you are responsible for a portion of in-class elicitation, post a brief description of your elicitation plan to the discussion section on Canvas by the end of Saturday preceding your in-class elicitation.
2. **Elicitation summary (due 2 days after elicitation session):**

Post a brief summary (1-2 paragraphs) of what the session focused on and what you found out.
3. **Data processing (due 1 week after elicitation session):**
 - (a) **ELAN audio transcription:** Students are required to submit three ELAN transcriptions – 1 from an in-class session and 2 from individual sessions. The audio recordings and ELAN transcription files should be uploaded to the course Dropbox folder. The resulting spreadsheet should be added as a separate sheet in the master Google Sheet.
 - (b) **Datalog on Google Sheets:** All transcribed data must be uploaded to the master Google Sheet no later than 1 week after the corresponding elicitation session.

Other assignments

1. Student questionnaire (end of week 1).
2. Assignment based on the World Atlas of Language Structures (Sept 20; details TBA).

Final project (40%)

The final project should be a 10-15 page paper on a topic of Indonesian grammar. Depending on your interests, there are two possible approaches to the project (but you can discuss deviations from these with the instructor):

1. A typologically-informed description of a particular grammatical domain, styled as a chapter in a descriptive grammar. You can find examples of potential topics in Appendices C-D in Bowerman (2015).
2. A theoretically-informed analysis of a grammatical phenomenon in Indonesian. This approach would require reading theoretical literature in addition to typological and language-specific references, but the topic would be more narrow than option 1.

The project consists of the following components, with the due dates listed for each component below:

1. Meet with instructor to discuss project topic by October 13.
2. Submit 1-3 page project proposal by October 20.

The project proposal should consist of a fieldwork plan for investigating the chosen topic, with a clear indication of which questions have already been answered with data collected prior to proposal submission. The proposal must make reference to relevant literature (to be provided by instructor during or following the individual meeting).

3. Submit 3-5 page progress report on final project by November 10.

The progress report should outline the research plan for the project and explain how much of the plan has been realized, discuss any challenges and unsolved issues, and provide a plan for the remaining elicitation.

4. Meet with instructor to discuss progress of final project November 13-17.
5. Present project in class December 4 or 6. The allocated time for presentation will depend on the number of enrolled students. This presentation serves as an opportunity to get feedback on the project and suggestions for the last few fieldwork sessions.
6. Submit the written up final version of the project by December 22.

Readings

All required and suggested readings will be available digitally through Canvas.

In addition to the readings listed on the syllabus, students are expected to read literature relevant to their final project, which will be assigned on an individual basis by the instructor. These readings will likewise be provided in digital format.

Equipment and software

Recording equipment and digital storage will be provided for class use by the instructor.

Students will need to install ELAN on their personal computers for data processing. This is the program we will use to transcribe audio files. Download link: <https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan/download>.

Class schedule

The schedule is subject to change. By default, the class on Mondays will be dedicated to elicitation with our consultant, Tia Wulansari, while the class on Wednesdays will be lecture or discussion-based. The listed topics and readings may be adjusted based on student interests.

	Topic	Readings and assignments
Week 1		
Sept 6 (Sept 10)	Introductions, class plan, elicitation basics	<i>Suggested:</i> Bower 2015:Ch.1 HW: student questionnaire
Week 2		
Sept 11	<i>elicitation (instructor demo)</i>	Sneddon 2003:Ch.1-2 <i>Suggested:</i> Bower 2015:Ch.3
Sept 13	Transcribing with ELAN, data management	Chelliah and de Reuse 2011:Ch.8.1-8.4
Week 3		
		<i>(individual elicitations start)</i>
Sept 18	<i>elicitation</i>	
Sept 20	Indonesian: basic clause structure	HW: Indonesian on WALS
Week 4		
Sept 25	<i>elicitation</i>	
Sept 27	Eliciting morphology and syntax	Bower 2015:Ch.6-7

Week 5

Oct 2 *elicitation*

Oct 4 Taking stock, brainstorming topics

Week 6

(Oct 9) *Indigenous Peoples' Day (no class)*

Oct 11 Eliciting semantics

Matthewson 2004

(Oct 11-13)

Meetings about final project

Week 7

Oct 16 *elicitation (instructor demo)*

Oct 18 Discussion of Monday elicitation

(Oct 20)

HW: Proposal for final project

Week 8

Oct 23 *elicitation*

Oct 25 Ethics in fieldwork

Rice 2011

Suggested: Bovern 2015:Ch.11

Week 9

Oct 30 *elicitation*

Nov 1 Group discussion

Prepare question/concern for discussion

Week 10

Nov 6 *elicitation*

Nov 8 Group discussion

Prepare question/concern for discussion

(Nov 10)

Progress report on final project

Week 11

Nov 13 *elicitation*

Nov 15 Discuss progress reports

(Nov 13-17)

Meetings about final projects

Week 12

Nov 20 *elicitation*

Nov 22 Discuss progress reports

Week 13

Nov 27 *elicitation*

Nov 29 Extra-linguistic considerations

Macaulay 2011

Suggested: Chelliah and de Reuse 2011:Ch.5,
Bovern 2015:Ch.10

Week 14		
Dec 4	student presentations	Project presentation
Dec 6	student presentations	Project presentation
Week 15		<i>(last week of individual elicitations)</i>
Dec 11	<i>elicitation</i>	
Dec 13	Wrap-up / Topic TBD	
(Dec 22)		Final project due

Absences and attendance policy

This class is designed to be fully in-person with no hybrid/Zoom backup and students are expected to attend the class meetings regularly. There is no official penalty for missed classes, but since the class is practice-based, missed classes will have a direct negative effect on your overall performance. If your absences accumulate to significantly impact your performance, I will reach out to you to discuss your options.

If you are sick, please notify the instructor and stay home to recover.

If you cannot attend a day when you are supposed to lead elicitation in class, please let me know at the earliest possible time, and try to arrange to swap with a classmate.

If you are sick on a day when you have an individual elicitation session, please let me and Tia know as soon as possible, and arrange to swap with a classmate if possible. **Please make it a top priority to never leave Tia wondering if someone will show up.**

Academic integrity

This class is a collaborative experience, and students are encouraged to discuss their fieldwork plans and results, as well as their final projects at all stages of development with each other. All written assignments, however, should be authored solely by the student, and credit should be given to any individual who contributed significantly to the ideas presented in the text. Students are allowed and encouraged to engage with previous research on Indonesian, but they must clearly state which generalizations are cited from the literature, and which are novel and based on data elicited in the class.

Students are expected to follow MIT's rules on academic integrity, as outlined in the Mind and Hand Book.

Students with Documented Disabilities

MIT is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with Disability and Access Services (DAS), prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed in a timely fashion. If you have a disability and are not planning to use accommodations, it is still recommended that you meet with DAS staff to familiarize yourself with their services and resources. Please visit the DAS website for contact information.

If you have already been approved for accommodations, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

The discipline of linguistics, while striving to be as objective and non-discriminatory as possible, is still largely built on a small sample of privileged voices. If there are any concerns you wish to raise, please reach out to me directly, or via the anonymous survey link provided below. As a participant of this course, I ask that you strive to maintain a respectful environment and honor the diversity of your fellow classmates. For additional resources, please explore the links below:

1. <https://hr.mit.edu/diversity-equity-inclusion>
2. <https://studentlife.mit.edu/impact-opportunities/diversity-inclusion>
3. <https://linguistics.mit.edu/diversity-statement/>

Anonymous survey: <https://forms.gle/YRF1ymJKLe19M7xR7>

References

- Bowern, Claire. 2015. *Linguistic fieldwork: A practical guide*, 2nd edn. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chelliah, Shobhana L., and Willem J. de Reuse. 2011. *Handbook of descriptive linguistic fieldwork*. Springer. <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/9115242>.
- Macaulay, Monica. 2011. Training linguistics students for the realities of fieldwork. In *The Oxford handbook of linguistic fieldwork*, ed. Nicholas Thieberger. OUP. doi:0.1093/oxfordhb/9780199571888.013.0021. <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/9499149>.
- Matthewson, Lisa. 2004. On the methodology of semantic fieldwork. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 70: 369–415.
- Rice, Keren. 2011. Ethical issues in linguistic fieldwork. In *The Oxford handbook of linguistic fieldwork*, ed. Nicholas Thieberger. OUP. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199571888.013.0019. <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/9499149>.
- Sneddon, James Neil. 2003. *The Indonesian language: Its history and role in modern society*. UNSW Press.