1. Course description

There are several areas of the world that exhibit unusually high ‘linguistic density’ - i.e., unusually high concentration of languages per square mile/number of speakers. These include Papua New Guinea, the Pacific coast of the United States, and the Caucasus mountain ranges, a relatively small area located between the Black and Caspian seas:

Here, over 30 languages from five different language families are spoken. Of these, three language families (North-West Caucasian, North-East Caucasian/Nakh-Dagestani, and South Caucasian/Kartvelian) are native to the Caucasus region and are not genetically related to any languages outside it. Despite belonging to different language families, many of the Caucasian languages exhibit certain similarities, which at the same time make these languages distinctly ‘Caucasian’. For instance, many of them have rich and complex consonant systems with such features as pharyngealization and ejectives. In fact, the language that has been described to have the biggest consonantal inventory (without click phonemes) is Ubykh (North-West Caucasian, extinct), with 84 consonant phonemes (for comparison, most English dialects have 24 consonant phonemes). At the same time, North-West Caucasian languages have extremely limited vowel inventories - one, two or three vowels, according to different analyses. North-East Caucasian languages show some tonal properties. In different parts of the Caucasus one finds polysynthetic verbs, highly complex agreement patterns and rich and varied case systems. Many of the languages of the Caucasus are still understudied.

This tutorial will cover the basic linguistic characteristics of the Caucasian languages in phonology, morphology and syntax. Apart from providing you with an opportunity to investigate the structure of these languages, the tutorial can contribute linguistic facts and data for your other projects.

After this course you should:

- be familiar with some of the variation in the language family, including the phonemic inventories, verbal morphology and agreement systems;
• have a good understanding of the major structural properties of Caucasian languages;
• be able to develop a basic analysis for novel data.

**Prerequisites:**

2. Course Requirements

**Class participation - 20%**
Class participation is an essential part of the course. Please make sure you come to class on time, well prepared, with the readings complete, and ready to contribute to the discussion.

**Problem sets - 20%**
There will be two problem sets, based on the readings and the linguistic phenomena discussed in class. Late submission of assignments is penalized (unless there is a note from a physician); 5% is taken off the total mark for the assignment for each day it is overdue.

**Build-your-own Caucasian language**

In order for you to understand ‘what it means to be a Caucasian language’, there are two assignments to ‘Build your own Caucasian language’. You can choose a name for the language and a hypothetical location where it is spoken, but the most important is that you make it a unique language that very clearly has a Caucasian structure. You may want to consult grammars of actual Caucasian languages for inspiration of what a typical (or less typical) Caucasian language looks like. If you’re into it, try to see the consequences of each choice you make in designing your language for the overall system of the language, and potentially also its learnability.

For each of the two assignments, you will be required to do an in-class presentation of the properties of your language, and submit a short (2-3 pages) write-up of it.

(As an aside, if you’re interested in invented languages in general, you might be interested in resources such as http://www.artoflanguageinvention.com/)

**Assignment 1: Phonology - 30%**

Describe the phonological system of your invented Caucasian language. Provide examples to illustrate the system, e.g. minimal pairs for phonological distinctions, cognates with related languages, etc. The following questions can be of help, but feel free to focus on subparts or other parts of the system if those are more interesting:

- What is the consonant inventory (including secondary articulations)?
- What is the vowel inventory? (long vowels, nasal vowels, diphthongs?)
- Are there allophones for any sounds?
- Are there clear assimilation or dissimilation rules? If so, which?
- Does the language have any tonal features, or distinct phonation properties (breathy voice, pharyngealization)?
- Has the phonological system of your language been influenced by neighboring languages (related or unrelated to it)? If so, how?

**Assignment 2: Verbal morphology - 30%**
Describe the verbal morphology of your invented Caucasian language (the same as in the previous assignment). Because the morphological properties of verbs vary across the Caucasian language families, a lot in this assignment will depend on what language family (North-West, North-East, South Caucasian) your language belongs to. You should provide at least the rules for subject and object (and indirect object, if applicable) marking, evidence for at least 3 tenses, and provide one non-indicative mood formation strategy.

The following questions can be of help, but feel free to focus on subparts or other parts of the system if those are more interesting:

- What tense/aspect/mood distinctions are expressed in your language? How are they expressed (prefix/suffix/stem allomorph)?
- How is agreement expressed in your language?
- Are there genders/noun classes in your language? How many?
- Are there complex tenses (auxiliary + main verb)?
- In what way, if any, is ergativity represented in the verbal/nominal morphology of your Caucasian language?

### 3. Weekly schedule (subject to revision)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings &amp; homework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Caucasian linguistics. Some basics of phonological reconstruction in the Caucasus. South Caucasian sounds systems.</td>
<td>Catford 1977 (intro and phonology) Comrie 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>North-East and North-West Caucasian sound systems.</td>
<td>P-set 1 due Shosted &amp; Chikovani 2006 Applebaum &amp; Gordon 2011 Kodzasov 1999 (sections 15.1 through 15.2.1.2) Nichols 2003 (sections 2 through 3.1 + see Appendices)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sociolinguistics of the Caucasus. Student presentations on the phonology of their invented Caucasian languages</td>
<td>Phonology presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agreement patterns and TAM morphology in the North-East and South of Caucasus. Ergativity.</td>
<td>Phonology write-up due Hewitt 1995, ch. 4.0-4.1 Helmbrecht 1996 Schmidt 1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Polysynthesis in North-West Caucasus</td>
<td>P-set 2 due Smeets 1984 (chapter 5) Korotkova &amp; Lander 2010 (sections 1&amp;2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Student presentations on the verbal morphology of their invented Caucasian languages</td>
<td>Verbal morphology presentations</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Verbal morphology write-up due</td>
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References


See separate document for recommended literature.