

Written Assignment #1

A Linguistic Ethnography of Your Family.

Interview members of your family – the more senior the better – and see if you can determine how your own family history fits into the historic patterns of language and immigration that we've been reviewing in class.

Choose an ancestor in your own family tree – if possible, an ancestor who immigrated to the U.S. – and write a historical, ethnographic narrative that's informed by the topics we have discussed in class:

- Determine the approximate date of your ancestor's first arrival in the U.S. and try to learn about his or her age and family situation on arrival.
- Determine what Language Family your ancestor represents, and the specific language within that linguistic family. What orthography do speakers of that language traditionally use, and what religion do its speakers traditionally follow? Does your ancestor follow that model?
- If possible determine how much English your ancestor and his or her family spoke when they arrived in the United States.
- Determine if you can what the family language policy was for your ancestor's family. (Families new to America sometimes try to maintain the heritage language with -- for example -- a heritage-language-at-home policy. Other families try to encourage children in the family to acquire fluent English as soon as possible, reasoning that fluent English will be necessary for success in the new culture. Still other families are too busy struggling to survive to worry about language policy for the next generation.) Determine if you can what the policy was for your family.
- If your ancestor did not speak English on arrival, did he or she learn English during his or her lifetime? Did he or she go to school in the U.S.? Did he or she graduate from high school? Attend college? [Other, non-linguistic issues you might think about: What kind of work did your ancestor do? Does your family have stories about the kinds of jobs that were available for immigrants at that time?]
- Have you heard any family stories or anecdotes about language issues faced by your ancestor and his or her family? According to family lore, was the entry into the U.S. a painful experience or relatively easy? Did your ancestor and his or her family live in a community with neighbors of a similar ethnic and linguistic background? Are there family stories about ethnic or linguistic or religious conflicts in those early days?
- If you are of Native-American or African-American ancestry, and your family has been in the U.S. for many generations with no specifically documented family history, are there family stories that can inform you about events in the early history of your family in

the United States? Can you construct a probable history of your family based on the stories that older members of your family tell, narratives you have heard in your community, or histories you have read?

For example, did part of your family migrate from a section of the U.S. where the local dialect is different from Pennsylvania/New Jersey? At family reunions do you hear different regional accents? Do members of your family have stories about this?

Conclude your historical ethnography by explaining how this first arrival in the U.S. connects to you in 2018.

This paper should be about 500 words in length. (A longer paper is also OK.)

You may use any expository or narrative style that suits you. One approach would be to write a third-person narrative: "My great-grandmother and great-grandfather both arrived in the U.S. from _____ (country or region) _____ in about the year _____ . . ." Or you might use a first-person narrative: "To solve the mystery of my family's origins, I first visited my great-aunt Mildred and asked her if she knew any stories about the first arrival of our family in the United States . . ."

Note that these essays will be regarded as personal and private, and will not be shared with the class or anyone else without your permission.

For academic sources, use the following (which you do *not* have to cite in your paper):

- "Writing Systems (Orthographies) of the World" (PowerPoint File on Blackboard)
- "Language Families of the World" (PowerPoint File on Blackboard)
- Class handout: Map of the Language Families of the World
- "The Indo-European Language Family" (PowerPoint File on Blackboard)
- Class handout: Divisions of the Indo-European Language Family
- David Crystal "The Languages of the World" (printed article on Blackboard)

Alternative Topic

If you'd rather not write a personal linguistic ethnography, here's an alternative topic:

One of your friends says "Indo-European? What's that? Indo-Europeans? Who were they?" In your own words, explain how the current theories about Indo-Europeans help us understand the languages that are spoken in the world (and in Philadelphia) in 2015.

Sources for this topic should include class material on Blackboard, especially "Horses, Hittites, and History" by Jared Diamond.