

LING 411/611 — The Na-Dene language family
McGill University
Winter 2021
Monday & Wednesday, 16:05–17:25 EST (UTC -3)

Instructor: *Dzéiwsh* James A. Crippen
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Content and objectives of this course

This course explores the Na-Dene (also known as Dene-Eyak-Tlingit) family of indigenous languages of North America, which includes languages from Alaska (e.g. Tlingit), northern Canada (e.g. Dëne Sųłiné), western Canada (e.g. Dakelh), Oregon (e.g. Tolowa), California (e.g. Hupa), and the American southwest (e.g. Navajo). Topics addressed include historical and comparative research, phonology, morphology and syntax, and semantics, as well as the intersections between language and culture in the family. Students will investigate and report on patterns and phenomena that are documented across multiple languages in the family, culminating in a final presentation and paper that summarize their research over the term.

Course requirements

The work for this course includes of a mix of reading, writing, discussion, and research in published literature and unpublished materials about languages in the Na-Dene family. In particular, this course involves:

1. Presentation of one assigned reading.
2. Posting questions about weekly readings.
3. A final paper along with a research question and bibliography.
4. An oral presentation in class about the final paper.

The final grade will be calculated according to the following percentages:

Presentation of readings	10%
Posting reading questions	10%
Class participation	10%
Research question (paper proposal)	10%
Initial bibliography	10%
Paper draft	20%
Final paper and presentation	30%

Presentation of readings: Each student will present one of the assigned readings to the class. Reading selections will be completed in the first week of class. Presentations should include a brief summary of the background, goals, and motivations for the paper, a sketch of the proposal and critical discussion of the arguments, connections to any relevant material and topics already discussed in class, and questions about terminology or other issues that are unclear to the student.

Reading questions: Except for the first week, each student will post a question or comment about one of the assigned readings to the MyCourses Discussion site by midnight before each class

(Sunday or Tuesday). Clarification questions are welcome but they should involve some discussion and not merely consist of “What does *x* mean?”. Reading questions are meant to facilitate in-class discussion of the readings; because of this, late questions will not be accepted.

Class participation: This is a seminar class so participation is an essential component of the course. Students are expected to have completed the readings and to be prepared to contribute to the discussion of them in class. Complete understanding of the readings is not expected, and contributing to the discussion does not mean being ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Instead, contributing to the discussion is about joining the conversation in a meaningful way. One effective way to contribute is to ask informed questions about the material, and another is to suggest connections between the material and related topics.

Final paper: The final paper may be on any topic in the phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, or semantics of Na-Dene languages. Since students will probably not have access to a speaker of a Na-Dene language, research for the paper will be based on published or archival materials. The paper should be explicitly comparative, looking at data from more than one language in the family and connecting the reported phenomena to crosslinguistic description and theory. More details on the format and structure of the final paper and presentation will be given in class.

Research question: The research question is the proposal for the final paper. The question itself should be expressed in a single sentence, with an accompanying paragraph that situates the question and connects it to wider issues.

Initial bibliography: The initial bibliography is a short collection of sources that will be the basis of the final paper. Some of these sources should be grammars or equivalent grammatical descriptions of Na-Dene languages which will provide primary data for the final paper’s analysis. Other sources should include previous research on the topic of the research question.

About the instructor

James A. Crippen [ˈkɹɪ.pɪn] is a new assistant professor of linguistics at McGill. James earned his PhD at the University of British Columbia in 2019, studying syntactic structures in the Tlingit [ˈkɫɪŋ.ɪt] language. He is a citizen of the Tlingit nation that spans the borders of Alaska in the United States and the Yukon Territory and British Columbia in Canada. In Tlingit society, *Dzéiwsh* [tsé:rwʃ] is a member of the Raven moiety in the *Deisheetaan* [tè:ʃi:ˈtʰà:n] clan from the *Kakáak’w* [kʰà:ˈqʰá:kʷ] House (known as the *Kak’weidi* [ˈqʰà.kʷè:ˈtí]) and is a child of the *S’iknax.ádi* [s’ik.nàχ.ˈʔá.tí] clan in the Wolf/Eagle moiety. He comes from the *Shtax’héen Kwáan* [ʃtəχ.ˈhí:n qʰwá:n] or ‘Stikine people’ of Wrangell, Alaska at the mouth of the Stikine River. James’s research is focused primarily on the Tlingit language and its relatives in the Na-Dene family, but he has also worked on Haida, Chinook Jargon, Ktunaxa, Polynesian languages, and Micronesian languages.

Statement on academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures; see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information.

If you are considering working on related topics for final papers in different courses, it is very important that you discuss this with all instructors involved beforehand in order to get approval.

Right to submit in French

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

People and land acknowledgement

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Readings

All readings are either available online or on MyCourses as PDFs. There are no textbooks or course packets to purchase for this course.

- Cook, Eung-Do. 1986. Athapaskan classificatory verbs. *Amerindia* 11: 11–24.
- Crippen, James A. 2019. The syntax in Tlingit verbs. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, PhD dissertation. LingBuzz [005047](#).
- Enrico, John. 2004. Toward Proto-Na-Dene. *Anth. Linguistics* 46.3: 229–302. JSTOR [30028963](#).
- Golla, Victor. 2011. Athabaskan (Na-Dene) languages. In *California Indian languages*, pp. 68–82. Berkeley: UC Press. ISBN 978-0-520-26667-4. Project MUSE [26243](#).
- Hargus, Sharon. 2010. Athabaskan phonetics and phonology. *Language & Linguistics Compass* 4.10: 1019–1040. DOI [10.1111/j.1749-818x.2010.00245.x](#).
- Hoijer, Harry. 1971. Athapaskan morphology. In *Studies in American Indian languages*, Jesse Sawyer (ed.), pp. 113–147. (U. of C. pubs. in ling. vol. 65). Berkeley: UC Press. ANLA [CA938H1971b](#).
- Kari, James. 1992. Some concepts in Ahtna Athabaskan word formation. In *Morphology now*, Mark Aronoff (ed.), pp. 107–131. ANLA [AT973K1992](#).
- Kibrik, Andrej A. 1993. Transitivity increase in Athabaskan languages. In *Causatives and transitivity*, Bernard Comrie & Maria Polinsky (eds.), pp. 47–68. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kibrik, Andrej A. 1996. Transitivity decrease in Navajo and Athabaskan: actor-affecting propositional derivations. In *Athabaskan language studies: Essays in honor of Robert W. Young*, Eloise Jelinek, Sally Midgett, Keren Rice, & Leslie Saxon (eds.), pp. 259–304. Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press.
- Krauss, Michael E. 1965. Eyak: A preliminary report. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 10: 167–187. ANLA [CA961K1965b](#).
- Krauss, Michael E. 1969. On the classifiers in the Athapaskan, Eyak, and the Tlingit verb. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, memoir 24. ANLA [CA961K1969a](#).

- Krauss, Michael E. 1977a. Proto-Athabaskan-Eyak fricatives and the first person singular. Unpublished manuscript. Fairbanks: ANLC. ANLA [CA961K1977a](#).
- Krauss, Michael E. 1977b. The Proto-Athabaskan and Eyak kinship system. Unpublished manuscript. Fairbanks: ANLC. ANLA [CA961K1977b](#).
- Krauss, Michael E. 1981. On the history and use of Comparative Athabaskan linguistics. Unpublished manuscript. Fairbanks: ANLC. ANLA [CA961K1981](#).
- Krauss, Michael E. 1986. Edward Sapir and Athabaskan linguistics. In *New perspectives in language, culture, and personality: Proceedings of the Edward Sapir Centenary Conference*, William Cowan, Michael K. Foster, & Konrad Koerner (eds.), pp. 147–191. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. ISBN 90-272-4522-3. ANLA [CA961K1986](#).
- Krauss, Michael E. 1987. The name Athabaskan. In *Faces, voices, & dreams: A celebration of the centennial of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka, Alaska, 1888–1988*, Peter L. Corey (ed.), pp. 104–108. Sitka: Alaska State Museums. ANLA [CA961K1987](#).
- Krauss, Michael E. 2005. *Athabaskan tone*. In *Athabaskan prosody*, pp. 51–136. (Current issues in ling. theory 269). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. DOI [10.1075/cilt.269](#).
- Leer, Jeff. 1999. Tonogenesis in Athabaskan. In *Cross-linguistic Studies of tonal phenomena: Tonogenesis, typology, and related topics*, Shigeki Kaji (ed.), pp. 37–66. Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. ANLA [CA965L1999b](#).
- Leer, Jeff. 2006. Na-Dene. In *Encyclop. of language and ling.*, 2nd edn., Keith Brown & Anne H. Anderson (eds.), vol. 8 pp. 428–430. Amsterdam: Elsevier. DOI [10.1016/Bo-08-044854-2/02272-0](#).
- Levine, Robert D. 1979. Haida and Na-Dene: A new look at the evidence. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 45.2: 157–170. JSTOR [1264780](#).
- McDonough, Joyce. 1999. Tone in Navajo *Anth. Linguistics* 41.4: 503–540. JSTOR [30028725](#).
- Mithun, Marianne. 1999. *The languages of Native North America*. Cambridge UK: CUP.
- Maddieson, Ian, Caroline Smith, & Nicola Bessell. Aspects of the phonetics of Tlingit. *Anthropological Linguistics* 43.2: 135–176. JSTOR [30028779](#).
- Nater, Hank F. 2006. Athabaskan verb stem structure: Tahltan. In *What's in a verb? Studies in the verbal morphology of languages of the Americas*, Grażyna J. Rowicka, & Eithne B. Carlin (eds.), pp. 29–52. Utrecht: LOT. HDL [1874/296557](#).
- Rice, Keren. 2000. *Morpheme order and semantic scope*. Cambridge UK: CUP.
- Rice, Keren & Willem de Reuse. 2017. The Athabaskan (Dene) language family. In *The Cambridge handbook of linguistic typology*, Alexandra Aikhenvald & Robert M.W. Dixon (eds.), ch. 23, pp. 707–746. Cambridge UK: CUP. ISBN 978-1-107-09195-5.
- Sapir, Edward. 1915. The Na-Dene languages: A preliminary report. *American Anthropologist* 17.3: 534–558. JSTOR [660504](#).
- Wright, Richard, Sharon Hargus, & Katherine Davis. 2002. On the categorization of ejectives: Data from Witsuwit'en. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 32.1: 44–77. DOI [10.1017/S0025100302000142](#).

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Schedule

<i>Week</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
1	Jan 11	Introduction; Review of the family	Mithun 1999: 346–367 Leer 2006; Krauss 1987	personal language essay (1 p; no grade)
2	Jan 18	History of research on the family	Krauss 1981; Krauss 1986	
3	Jan 25	Phonetics	Hargus 2010; Wright, Hargus, & Davis 2002	
4	Feb 1	Tone and tonogenesis	McDonough 1999; Krauss 2005; Leer 1999	
5	Feb 8	Verb template and affix ordering	Hoijer 1971; Kari 1992; Rice 2000: 9–29; Crippen 2019: 10–16	research question due
6	Feb 15	The classifier: Voice, valency, maybe state	Kibrik 1993; Kibrik 1996; Crippen 2019: 3§1, 4§1, 5§1	
7	Feb 22	Classificatory (quali- ficatorial) verbs	Cook 1986; Crippen 2019: 51–61	initial bibliography due
	Mar 1–5 Spring recess	
8	Mar 8	Stem variation	Crippen 2019: 89–95; Nater 2006	
9	Mar 15	Aspect and the conju- gation classes	TBD	paper draft due
10	Mar 22	Verb theme categories	TBD	
11	Mar 29	Reconstruction: Eyak, Fricatives and kinship	Krauss 1965; Krauss 1977a; Krauss 1977b	
12	Apr 5	Na-Dene and Haida	Sapir 1915; Levine 1979; Enrico 2004	
13	Apr 12– Apr 15	presentations (class on Thursday)	—	final presentations
	Apr 19– Apr 30 Exams	final paper due Apr 30