

Linguistics Segue

Student Instructions

Introduction: Many have argued that one of the few things that distinguish humans from other animals is our ability to use language. Linguistics is not the study of a particular language but the study of languages in general. As linguists work with people who speak endangered languages they frequently note that much of the vocabulary that is recorded is about the plants, animals, and environments (or the ethnobiology) of their culture. Arguably more than 6000 languages are spoken today although this number is rapidly decreasing as ones spoken by only a few people disappear as they grow old and die without passing on their language.

During Class:

1. The instructor will present a set of plants that have a set of names from different parts of Polynesia and other locations with the same plants and Austronesian languages.
2. The instructor will ask groups of two to take five minutes to look for relationships among the words for each plant.
3. After the time is over each group will quickly present what they have observed and the instructor will present the proto-Austronesian reconstructed relationships for the words as recognized by modern linguists.
4. The instructor will conclude with a brief discussion about careers that use linguistics.

Follow-up: Try to identify as many different languages as you can that are spoken by people in your community, by family, friends, etc. How diverse is our community? Write up your list and bring this to class next week.