



Decoding Egypt: From Ancient to Modern Language

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: LING 3702

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 53

Instructor: Dr. Morgan Rood Staley

Course Description

Egypt is a land of many languages. From the hieroglyphs seen on Tutankhamun's tomb to the Classical Arabic heard in prayer at the Al-Azhar Mosque, the linguistic diversity in Egypt is a critical piece of the culture and history of the country. In this course we will investigate several Egyptian languages, and we will use our developing linguistic knowledge to engage with Egypt as it exists today.

In the classroom we will study the history and structure of the language family found in Egypt. This includes a rich tapestry of languages: ancient (old and middle Egyptian), liturgical (Coptic, Classical Arabic), vernacular (Egyptian Arabic, Siwi Berber), and standardized (Modern Standard Arabic). We will investigate these languages through the lens of linguistic typology, a framework that explores the different types of grammatical patterns found in and across languages. With a particular focus on word formation and sentence structure, we will examine how the typological patterns relate to one another and how they can inform our understanding of human language more generally. When we step out of the classroom, you will see and hear these Egyptian languages and engage with the people who speak them.

A secondary focus of this program will be linguistic methodology, and over the course of the program, you will practice three unique field research methods employed by linguists: formal elicitation sessions, rapid and anonymous surveys, and linguistic landscape documentation. In the classroom we will learn to write research questions and design studies that get to the

heart of language ty and its intersection with society. Working in both small groups and individually, you will tailor these projects to your specific interests and language expertise.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Understand how linguists think and talk about language, and in particular, how typological research can help linguists understand the big picture of human language
2. Identify typological patterns in language data and describe the significance of these patterns as they relate to word formation and sentence structure
3. Gain insight on the multilingual society that is modern day Egypt and discuss the implications of multilingualism on both individuals and communities.
4. Understand the connections between the languages of Egypt's past and the languages of Egypt's present
5. Ethically collect novel linguistic data both in small groups and individually
6. Identify and reflect on language use in your own lives and how performance of language constructs an individual's identity

Student Learning Outcomes

This course will address three **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**. First, you will learn to **identify, define, and solve problems** by designing and conducting a small-scale field research project. This project will require identifying a clear research question, planning data collection, and navigating the logistic realities of field research. In this process you will also **master a body of knowledge** and mode of inquiry as you learn the central questions of linguistics as a scientific discipline and practice three unique methodological approaches to address these questions. Finally, you will **understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies** through both field excursions in and around Cairo as well as through your research projects that will include one-on-one interactions and interviews with the local community.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course **exemplifies liberal education** by its interdisciplinary nature and its focus on the relationships between language, place, and identity. We will investigate how the languages we speak construct and perform our identity, and we will examine the effect that various languages have on the communities in which they are (or are not) spoken. You will learn to ask critical questions about language use that can be both applied throughout their time in Egypt but also in your own language communities upon return to Minneapolis.

The course will fulfill the **goals of Theme courses** by encouraging you to grapple with the ethical challenges of language use as a proxy for power and to reflect on the shared

responsibility we as individuals and communities hold to consider and celebrate the validity of language on every level. As we think about the role language plays in our lives, we will also discuss the implications of language use on both an individual level and within the broader community. Throughout our field experiences, you will connect theory and practice by documenting the linguistic landscape of Egypt and interrogating the impact this landscape has on the competing ideals of cultural preservation and societal cohesion. Additionally, discussions on ethical dilemmas while conducting field research with language speakers will foster critical inquiry, challenging you to think independently and empathetically.

The course will meet the **Global Perspectives Theme criteria** through immersive experiences in Egypt's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. You will engage directly with the complexities of multilingual societies by focusing on Egypt's unique linguistic heritage as well as its broader political, social, and religious implications in both the Middle East and globally. What does it mean to speak one language at home and another at school (e.g., the case with some Siwi Berbers speaking both Berber and Modern Standard Arabic)? What does it mean to speak one language on the street and another in a house of worship (e.g., the case with some Christians speaking Egyptian Colloquial Arabic and Coptic)? What role does the ancient writing system of Egyptian hieroglyphics play in the historical narrative constructed by Egyptians today? Through interactive discussions and reflective writing assignments, you will explore how power is claimed via language use, and the significance of such linguistic cachet both within Egypt and at home in your own lives.

This course addresses the **goals for a Core course** as well. With hands-on field research conducted in small groups as well as writing assignments tailored to your personal experiences, you will be able to process, reflect, and articulate what you're learning both individually and as a cohort throughout the course.

The course aligns in particular with the **Social Sciences Core requirements** by offering a data-informed exploration of identity and community within the context of language. You will collect and analyze linguistic data using three classic field methods employed by linguists. The first two are qualitative methods: a series of formal elicitation interviews (conducted in small groups) and linguistic landscape documentation (collected individually). The final methodology is a quantitative method employed by sociolinguists: rapid and anonymous surveys (also in small groups). Best practices for data collection will be discussed as you design and conduct your research projects. For each of these projects, you will write both reflective essays and formal write-ups of their data as appropriate for the discipline of linguistics. We will also consider how the data we collect can contribute to the greater goals of linguistics as a scientific discipline.

Methodology

Instructional Time

In accordance with university policy, this 3-credit course will include approximately 750 minutes of instructional time and an estimated 1,500 minutes of independent student work per week.

I will dedicate at least 750 minutes per week to engaging with you through various activities, including:

1. Delivering synchronous lectures
2. Facilitating and monitoring class discussions and group projects
3. Organizing guest lectures with local experts
4. Leading experiential learning opportunities, such as excursions in and around Cairo (Note: informal instruction, such as excursions, is counted at half-time).

You are expected to spend a minimum of 1,500 minutes per week on independent work, which includes:

1. Completing assigned readings and problem sets (typically, 2 hours of preparation time is required for each hour of lecture)
2. Carrying out elicitation sessions and rapid surveys for group fieldwork assignments (Projects #1 and #2)
3. Conducting individual fieldwork by documenting and analyzing the linguistic landscape of Cairo (Project #3)
4. Researching and writing your final paper

Experiential Learning & Field Visits

As part of our course, we will visit a number of key sites both within Cairo and in the surrounding area. While in Cairo we will visit the following sites:

1. The Great Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx
2. The Egyptian National Museum
3. Khan El Khalili Bazaar
4. Coptic Cairo
5. The Citadel
6. Al-Azhar Mosque

We will also take one multi-day trip to Upper Egypt. This will include a flight to Luxor, a 4-day cruise down the Nile, and a return flight from Aswan. Some highlights of this trip will include:

1. Luxor Temple

2. Karnak Temple
3. Valley of the Kings
4. Abu Simbel

Each excursion will relate in some way to our readings and class themes, and we will prepare for and debrief each excursion in small groups during class time. However, there will also be time allotted for you to enjoy these unforgettable experiences on your own.

Course Prerequisites

None

Required Reading / Materials

Readings will be drawn from the following list of books and journal articles. All required readings will be available on Canvas.

- Batic, G. C. (2022). *The Oxford Handbook of African Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frajzyngier, Z. & Shay, E. 2017. *The Afroasiatic languages*. Cambridge Language Surveys.
- Goldschmidt, A. (2008). *A brief history of Egypt*. Facts on File.
- Sakel, J., & Everett, D. L. *Linguistic fieldwork: a student guide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Song, J. J. (2014). *Linguistic typology: Morphology and syntax*. Routledge.
- Serreli, V. (2024). *Language, Society and Ideologies in Multilingual Egypt: Arabic and Berber in the Siwa Oasis*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Silverman, D. P. (1990). *Language and writing in ancient Egypt*. Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Formal elicitation	45%
Sociolinguistic survey	30%
Linguistic landscape documentation	25%
Overall grade	100%

Assessment Details

Your evaluation will be largely drawn from the **three major projects** introduced above. Each is centered on a particular methodology of linguistic fieldwork meant to collect the type of language data we will be using in class. Two of these assignments will be done in small groups, and the third will be individual. With the exception of the final group paper for Project #1, all papers will be a maximum of 2 pages. The final paper will be 5-7 pages in length.

Project One: Formal Elicitation

The most significant group project will be formal elicitations with speakers of Egyptian Arabic or a minority language of interest. I will place you in groups of 2-3 based on your research interests and language expertise. This project involves several interview sessions both during and outside of class time where you will meet with your speaker to collect language data that will be used to test and illustrate concepts from our course. This project will be heavily scaffolded and broken down into a number of smaller writing assignments (both individual and group, see evaluation rubric above). The shorter assignments (maximum 2 pages) will be due weekly during the course. A more detailed group paper (5-7 pages) synthesizing all the data your group has collected will be due within two weeks upon return from Egypt.

	Points
Explaining the goals of linguistic typology (individual)	5
Getting acquainted with language data (individual)	5
Short description of a syntactic phenomenon (group)	5
Short reflection on elicitation sessions (individual)	5

Write-up of elicited data (group)	10
Final paper (group, due after return)	15
Total points	45

Project Two: Sociolinguistic Survey

The second group project for assessment will be an iteration of the classic "rapid and anonymous survey" utilized by sociolinguists to collect a large amount of language data in a small amount of time. The project will include three trips to Cairo's famous outdoor marketplace, during which you will observe language use and design a survey investigating a question of your choosing within the larger umbrella of language variation. Your group will subsequently conduct your survey on your third trip to the market. This project will culminate in a written report of both your results and reflections from practicing this type of fieldwork. The short reflection will be informal and written individually, while the official write-up of your data will be written as a group. Both will be due on the last day of class.

	Points
Language observations in the market (group)	5
Research question and plan for elicitation (group)	5
Lab report (group)	10
Reflection (individual)	5
Total points	25

Project Three: Linguistic Landscape Documentation

The third project will be individualized and will serve as your digital journal as you make your way through the course. This project is an implementation of linguistic landscape field research, which at its most reductive involves taking pictures of visual language (street signs, commercial advertisements, etc.) and analyzing how this visual language affects the physical space and the community within it. A required pre-departure reading will prepare you for the task by introducing formal models and best practices for this type of research. While the journal you keep will be graded as part of your assessment, I also hope that this particular project will be a fun way to thread linguistics throughout your day and provide a starting point upon which you can reflect on your experiences more generally. You will use Google Docs for your journal entries and share the document with me. A minimum of 10 journal entries will be required, and I will grade the journal holistically within two weeks of returning from Egypt.

	Points
Journal entries (individual, x10)	3
Total points	30

Course Content

5/18

Cairo

- Arrival and Orientation

5/19

Cairo

- City Tour/Tahrir Square

5/20

Cairo

- Guest Lecture

5/21

Cairo

- Experiential Learning excursion at the Pyramids

5/22

Cairo

- Guest Lecture

5/23

Cairo

- Egyptian Museum (a.m.)
- Khan #1 (p.m.)

5/24

Cairo

- Khan #2 (a.m.)
- Al-Azhar Mosque (p.m.)

5/25

Cairo

- Rest Day

5/26

Fly to Luxor

- Luxor Temple
- Karnak Temple

5/27

Nile Cruise

- Valley of the Kings
- Hatshepsut Temple
- Esna Lock

5/28

Nile Cruise

- Horus Temple
- Temple of Sobek

5/29

Nile Cruise

- Abu Simbel
- Felucca Sail

5/30

Aswan/fly to Cairo

- Philae Temple
- Nubian Village

5/31

Cairo

- Rest day

6/1

Cairo

- Khan #3 (a.m.)
- Guest instructor: Calligraphy class (p.m.)

6/2

Cairo

- Guest lecture (a.m.)
- Coptic Cairo (p.m.)

6/3

Cairo

- Guest Lecture

6/4

Cairo

- Instruction (a.m.)
- The Citadel (p.m.)

6/5

Cairo

- Instruction (a.m.)

6/6

Cairo

- Rest day

6/7

Cairo

- Al Moaz

6/8

Flight to Minneapolis

DRY

SAFE

Policies

Course Policies

Required Readings/Materials

All required readings will be available on Canvas.

Late Work Policy

Assignments are due on the date and time indicated on Canvas. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior authorization. For extenuating circumstances that impact your ability to meet deadlines or participate in class activities, you are responsible for alerting me as soon as possible. Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances per [the U of M policy for makeup work for legitimate absences](#).

Attendance

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. All absences are unexcused except for illnesses, which must be directly discussed with me ahead of time, when possible.

Extra Credit

There will be no opportunities for extra credit in this course.

Name/Pronouns

I will do my best to address you by a preferred name or gendered pronoun that you have identified. Please advise me of this preference early so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. My pronouns are she/her/hers.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or

misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).