

8. Language Endangerment II

Introduction to Language (Ling 201)

Prof. Pentangelo

Spring 2026

History

- How were the Americas *first* settled?
- Approximately when?

“It is likely that at the time of European contact the average number of speakers of a North American language was only a few thousand.” (Golla, p.1)

- When was the “time of European contact”?

John White, Map of Virginia, 1585 AD





Mesa Verde National Park, an Ancestral Puebloan site in Colorado, ~1200 AD



Newspaper rock, Utah, contributed to by various Indigenous nations up to ~1300 AD



“The town of Pomeiocc,” 1590, depicting an Algonquian town in North Carolina. This is an engraving by Theodor de Bry after a watercolor by John White.



“Secoton,” 1585, another Algonquian town in North Carolina. This is a watercolor by John White.

Languages

“Although some of these [indigenous languages of North America] are more immediately threatened than others, only a handful are spoken by more than 10,000 people and all must be considered endangered in the long run.” (Golla p.1)

- Is 10,000 people a lot?
- Do you know the population of Staten Island? A little less than 500,000.
- The smallest NFL stadium in the US is Soldier Field, with a seating capacity of 61,500.

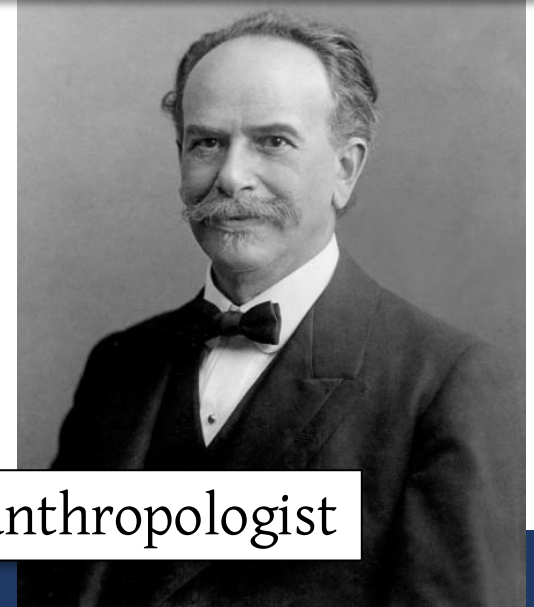
Languages

“312 distinct indigenous languages are recognized as having been spoken during the past 500 years in North America. Of these, only sixty-five became extinct [...] before about 1930. [...] Of the 247 languages that survived past 1930, a little under one fourth (fifty-eight) have already ceased to be spoken as first languages, a loss of about nine languages per decade, and more will follow soon.” (p.2)

“The perception is widespread among North American Indian tribes that the loss of a group’s traditional language is a serious threat to their communal identity.” (p.7)

- How can languages be revitalized?
- How are endangered languages documented?
- Grammar, dictionary, texts – Boasian trilogy.

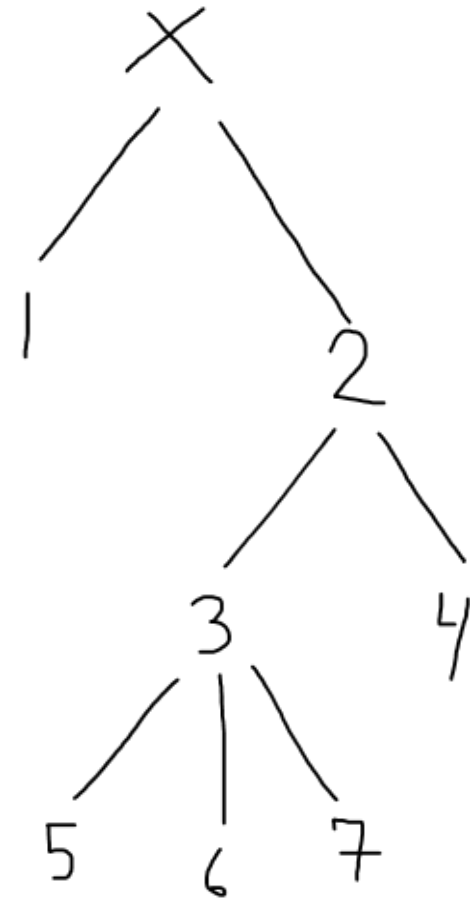
I’ll show you some examples of these now.



Franz Boas, anthropologist

Language Families

- What is a language family?
- A bunch of languages that descend from the same ancestral language.
- You can have families within families (e.g. Germanic within Indo-European)
- Golla mentions “fourteen major language families” of indigenous North American languages (p.4).



Language Families

- We'll explore five of these language families in class tonight:
- (1) Eskimo-Aleut (aka Eskaleut)
- (2) Algic
- (33) Uto-Aztecan
- (45) Siouan-Catawba
- (57) Iroquoian

(The numbers to the left are those found in Golla.)

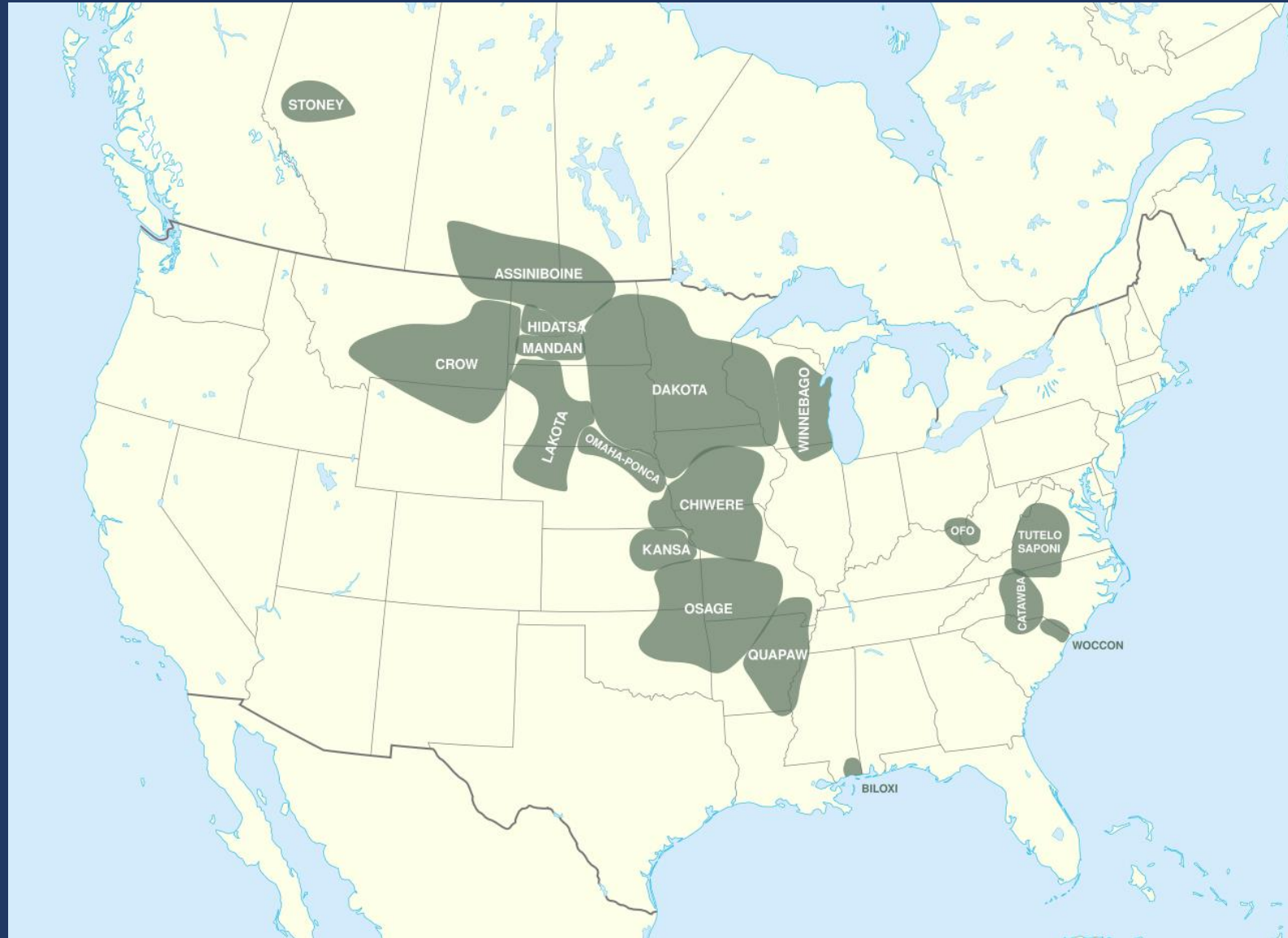
Eskimo-Aleut



Algic



Siouan-Catawba

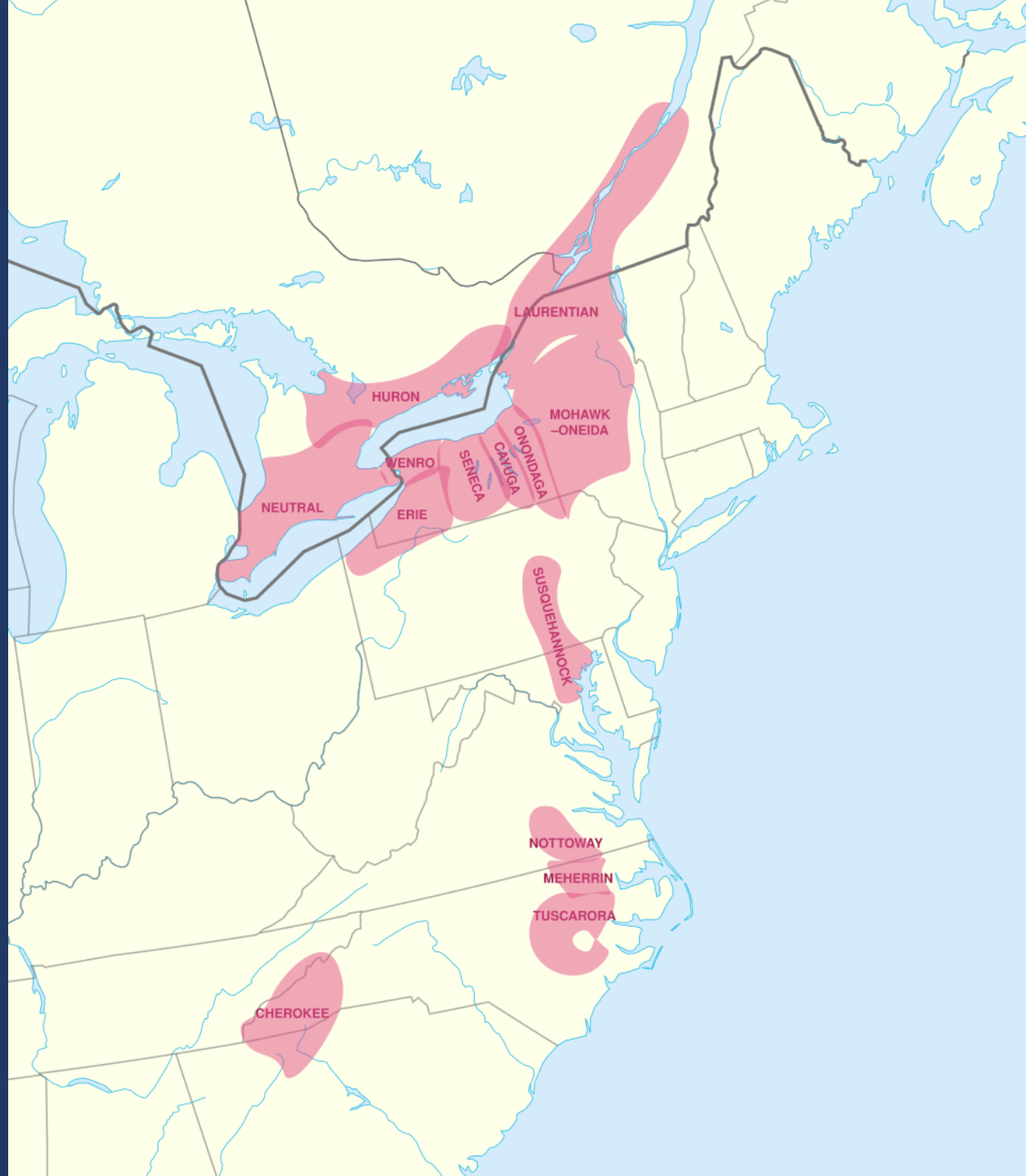


Uto-Aztecan



Iroquoian

Break up into groups and do the activity on your sheets now.



Presentations

I'll try to find recordings of what these languages sound like.

- Eskimo-Aleut
- Algic
- Siouan-Catawba
- Uto-Aztecan
- Iroquoian

Group Assignment #2

- In two weeks, Group Assignment #2 is due. You can do this in groups or individually. Take time now to pick groups (or abstain from doing so).
- Choose a language from one of the five language families discussed today. The language you choose should *not* be one that a group presented on today.
- On 4/27, turn in a paper on this language. Your group will also present for 5 minutes on this language, plus take 5 minutes of questions.
- You will address: what family is this language part of? where is/was it spoken? how many speakers does it have today? what is its early history of documentation? are there ongoing revitalization efforts? what challenges face this language's survival?
- DO NOT use AI as a source for this paper or presentation. Cite all sources using any major citation format (MLA, APA, etc. all fine).

Cool classes!

I'd love to see you there!

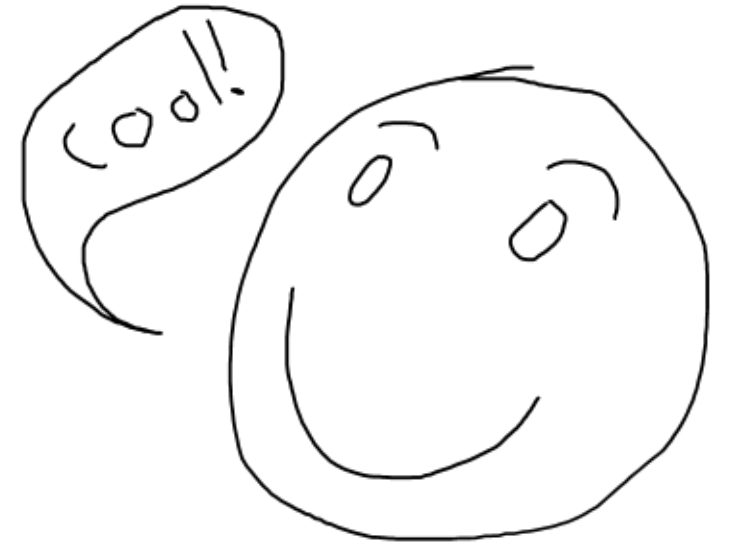
In the Fall, I'll be teaching two classes:



Semantics and Pragmatics
Wednesdays, 6:30 to 9:50
Ling 405 23727



Sociology of Language
Mondays, 6:30 to 9:50
Ling 380 23729



For next time:

- Read the entry in the *Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages* on the language that you/your group will be presenting on in two weeks. There will be a quiz at the start of class.

If you want to know your current grade, hang out.