

**Language Documentation Center**  
**University of Hawai'i at Manoa**  
**[www.ling.hawaii.edu/~uhdoc](http://www.ling.hawaii.edu/~uhdoc)**

**Who we are?**

The Language Documentation Center (LDC) is a pioneer project initiated in 2003 by graduate students in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM). The LDC is a student-run enterprise with a mission to teach language documentation skills to native speakers of endangered and under-documented languages.

Working in collaboration with the Department of Linguistics, the LDC provides hands-on experience for linguistics students, especially those enrolled in the department's Master's degree in *Language documentation and conservation*, while at the same time providing training for native speakers committed to the preservation of their languages. In Spring 2005, the Center worked with a total of twenty native speakers. We have documented twenty-three languages since our inception.

**How does LDC work?**

(i) We recruit the project's participants (native speakers of undocumented and/or endangered languages) by posting advertisements throughout campus, by email listservs, by word of mouth, by organizing information booths, and so on.

(ii) The LDC offers eight two-hour workshops on Saturday mornings over a single semester. During the first hour, graduate students teach participants various skills (such as finding existing resources on their language, digital recording, introductions to phonetics and phonology, the basics of grammatical categories and translation skills, etc.). The second hour is devoted to applying the documentation techniques to the speaker's language.

(iii) The minimum requirements for each individual language project are as follows: (a) provide general background information about the language and the language community, (b) compile a word list, (c) record sound files accompanying the word list, (d) gloss and translate a short text. Speakers are encouraged to create language projects above and beyond these minimum requirements, and the majority of participants do so.

(iv) Graduate students team up with native speakers, and they meet outside of the workshops to work in-depth on the participant's language project (be it the phonemic inventory of the speaker's language, a compilation of proverbs or idiomatic expressions, a glossed text, etc.).

(v) At the end of each semester, participants' projects are uploaded and launched on the Linguistics Department web site. The Center also organizes a closing ceremony during which participants present their projects and receive a diploma.

(vi) In compensation for the participants' effort and commitment, LDC offers a \$200 honorarium and a copy of the Shoebox dictionary-making software from SIL.

(v) Funding is sought on a semester-by-semester basis. At this time, most LDC funding comes from on-campus entities, such as the National Foreign Language Research Center, the Student Equity, Excellence and Diversity at UHM, and various centers for areal studies. Their assistance is essential for the maintenance of the LDC.

(vi) The workshops are held in a state-of-the-art university lab facility, which contains two sound-proof recording booths and ten computers equipped with a suite of software dedicated to linguistic analysis.

### **General considerations**

The dedication of the volunteers from the Linguistics Department is the main ingredient for success! The diversity of students in Hawai'i is another major asset of the project, but it is anticipated that this project can be replicated elsewhere. Below is a non-exhaustive list of guidelines to initiate a comparable project.

(i) Graduate students in Linguistics who act as mentors and teachers are volunteers. (In our case, the director is a graduate assistant who receives support from the UHM Linguistics Department).

(ii) Participants come from a wide variety of backgrounds; therefore the workshops do not assume any prior knowledge of linguistics. Native speakers taking part in the project for more than one semester need not attend all workshops.

(iii) Speakers choose their personal projects in addition to the LDC's requirements. However, in order to accommodate the speakers' level of commitment, the requirements remain minimal.

(iv) Equally essential is to allow flexibility for the individual projects, so as to accommodate speakers' interests. Continuing participants have the choice to work on a different project every semester or to expand an earlier project.

(v) The LDC's main goal is not to produce linguists but to spark interest in the hearts of its participants. The LDC's mission is to familiarize native speakers with documentation techniques as well as with endangered language issues, in the hope that they will pass on their knowledge to their home community, thereby encouraging grassroots documentation efforts.

Please do not hesitate to contact the LDC if you have any questions or concerns. If you are interested in starting a comparable center in your community, the LDC at the University of Hawai'i is more than happy to provide additional guidance and assistance.

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