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Beginning Tibetan

TIBE 1503 J Term Course

(3 Credits)

Nepal: Intensive Tibetan Language

This syllabus is representative of a typical term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from term to term.

Course Description

Tibetan language is an important tool of communication to study and understand the Tibetan diaspora and Tibetans in Tibet, as well as Himalayans along the Tibetan borderlands. The primary objective of the Introductory Tibetan language course is for students to develop oral skills that will allow them to communicate with members of different Tibetan communities. This course includes intensive language classes and placement with a Tibetan homestay in Boudha, a Tibetan and Himalayan enclave outside Kathmandu. The students learn modern standard Lhasa dialect, which is customarily used (at least as a lingua franca) by both Tibetans within Tibet and in exile, as well as by the many Himalayan peoples who have had a Tibetan language education. Reading and writing skills are also introduced, since students are required to include names and terms written in Tibetan script and/or scholarly transliteration (i.e. the Wylie system) in their papers and research projects.

By the end of this course, students should be able to converse in beginning Tibetan in the context of interacting with homestay families, community members and excursion participants, and understand grammatical basics of the language and the ways it diverges from their native language. Students should gain the ability to employ Tibetan in appropriate cultural contexts (for example, using the honorific forms when speaking with elders).

Language classes will take place for three weeks in Nepal. All written materials are studied directly in Tibetan script and not in a phonetic system. Vocabularies, grammar, sentence structures and tenses are effectively introduced in lessons thoughtfully planned around topics most relevant to daily lives. Besides Tibetan script, students are expected to use Wylie (universally accepted system of Tibetan transliteration).

This course exposes students to basic colloquial Tibetan vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures, with an emphasis on enabling students to gain oral proficiency. This course aims to prepare students to put their language skills to practical use in Boudha. Through a combination of formal class and oral training with Tibetan conversation partners and language boost sessions, students can expect to achieve the necessary skills to carry on a simple conversation in modern Tibetan. The Tibetan language pledge, in effect throughout the three-week course, encourages students to practice their Tibetan outside their classes, in homestay, on excursion and in the community. The Tibetan script is introduced in the first three days of class and therefore all written materials will be studied directly in Tibetan and not in a phonetic system. All quizzes, assignments and examples given in class will be written in this particular Tibetan script.

The course is composed of three components: grammar study, conversational practice with language partners and interactive “language boost” sessions.

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- **Language Class** (two hours/five days a week)**:** Native Tibetan instructors teach selected points of grammar as well as expressions useful in daily life. From the very first day onwards the students will be introduced to the fascinating world of Tibetan grammar and Tibetan grammatical categories which are quite special (even unique). For example, in the Tibetan language letters have genders, and verbs are conjugated depending on the presence or absence of volition, and whether one has direct versus inferential evidence, etc. Students memorize vocabulary lists in addition to submitting written homework (one hour/five days a week). Students are required to learn the grammatical structures in order to be able to take 2 quizzes a week in which the new vocabulary and the grammar will be assessed.
- **Conversation Partner Class** (one hour/five days a week)**:** A precious 1:1 learning situation with trained native-speaker conversation partners allows the students to practice the material introduced in class as well as talk about topics of their individual interest. These classes, in which as little English as possible is used, will help the student to thoroughly train and digest the grammar as well as manifold vocabulary.
- **Language Boost** (once or twice a week in alternation with the previous two classes)**:** These sessions are especially designed to augment language partner and grammar study classes through a variety of applied activities. Vocabulary reviews and sentence pattern drills revise previously introduced words and grammar structures through repeated application and usage. 'Mill and trade' and language games are designed for students to actively utilize their language learning through interactions with other students and teachers.
- **Language Pledge:** Speaking Tibetan throughout each day, with classmates, teachers, homestay families, and community members will solidify student confidence, enhance fluency, and motivate deeper engagement in the cultural life of Tibetan communities.

Language Levels and Placement
Students are placed into appropriate language course levels based on a Tibetan proficiency exam at the beginning of the program.

Learning Outcomes
The *Beginning Tibetan* language course encompasses 45 academic hours (3 credits). Upon its completion, students should be able to:

- Converse in elementary Tibetan in the context of interacting with homestay families, community members and program participants
- Understand grammatical basics of the Tibetan language and the ways the language diverges from their native language
- Employ Tibetan in appropriate cultural contexts (for example, using the Honorific forms when speaking with elders)

Course Requirements

Methodology
Each week entails: fifteen hours of teaching (grammar and vocabulary sessions, drills, and sessions with conversation partners). There will be a mid-term and final exam.

Useful Texts
Oertle, Franziska. (2019) *Bod skad snying po*. *The Heart of Tibetan Language.* Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA).
Textbook: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EYKEpix2PNnvUfIFiI5wpqYIgk_imJqP/view.
Book of exercises: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HMHuIfDxpPO22ogpayRYPl8PHKFh5qsP/view.
Audio recordings: https://www.franziska.in/the-audios
Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo. (1993) Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House.
Goldstein, Melvyn. (2001) *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan.* Berkeley: University of California Press. Available in Indian edition.
Goldstein, Melvyn. (1984) *English-Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan.* Berkeley: University of California Press. Available in Indian edition.
Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library (THDL) Tibetan to English Translation Tool. http://www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/translate.php. For online usage, as well as instructions to download offline version.
Tournadre, Nicholas & Sangda Dorje. (2003) *Manual of Standard Tibetan: Language*

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and Civilization. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

Daily Class Schedule

- We have two hours of Tibetan language class interchanging with one hour of conversation partner class or boost class every morning from Monday through Friday.
- Each class begins with a review session. Students are drilled and each and every student is invited for active participation, which ensures each student's attention in the class.
- Quiz is conducted twice every week for constant assessment of the level in which each student is. The following classes are then planned and structured accordingly.
- Students are given daily assignments. They get help from conversation partners and homestay families to complete the assignments. After assignments are submitted, they get them back the next day with feedback and corrections. As the pace of language class is pretty fast, prompt feedback ensures much needed prompt removal of any doubts or confusions to be able to move forward to new chapters.
- Teaching assistant is available throughout the day from Monday through Friday should the students have any question regarding Tibetan language.
- Students take a mid-term exam after a week and a half and a final exam at the end of the course.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Instructors evaluate each student's performance based on following criteria. Final grades are assigned by the Academic Director in consultation with the language instructors on the basis of each instructor's evaluation, each student's own self-evaluation and the Academic Director's observation of each student.

Methods of Evaluation

Grammar (10%)

Grammar is an integral part of any language. It governs the composition of word order, conjugation, tenses etc. Grammar is evaluated by going through students' homework, test papers and speech.

Vocabulary (10%)

New vocabularies are introduced with the introduction of every new lesson. Some vocabularies are given more importance than others based on how often the vocabularies are used in daily lives and in the class. Students are also expected to acquire more vocabularies from conversation partners, homestay families and books and practice them.

Comprehension (10%)

Students are graded based on their ability to comprehend statements or questions and to answer or carry on the conversation accordingly.

Pronunciation and Fluency (10%)

Native pronunciation is not expected. However, students' pronunciation should be clear and comprehensible to classmates and others. Fluency is also taken into consideration.

Motivation and Attitude (10%)

Students are expected to be positive and enthusiastic towards the host culture and language class, and to be positive, encouraging and helpful to their classmates as well.

Attendance (10%)

Students are expected to attend all classes. If students get sick or have an important appointment, they need to inform the teacher.

Language Use Outside Class (10%)

Language use is not limited to class. Students need to use Tibetan as much as possible with Tibetan people and among themselves.

Tibetan script (10%)

Reading and Writing.

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Progress (20%)
Students' progress is evaluated based on homework, quizzes and exams.

Oral proficiency interviews are conducted at the end of the semester to provide a measurement of students' overall linguistic progress.

Grading Scale: The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
Below 64	F

Expectations and Policies
Class attendance is mandatory and unexcused absences will reduce the language grade (see attendance policies in the front matter of the syllabus).

Show up prepared. Be on time, have your assignments completed and points in mind for clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.

Have assignments completed on schedule and done according to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.

Ask questions in class. Teachers are highly respected in Nepal and among Tibetan and Himalayan peoples. Your polite and engaged behavior is expected.

Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

Respect differences of opinion (classmates', teachers'). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the program handbook given to you at Orientation.

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