

Phonology Paper Assignment*

This paper is intended to be a first exposure to doing phonology on your own, making use of first-hand data (from a living, fluent speaker). It should not be done exclusively from reference sources. The paper should be roughly 5–8 pages.¹ Note that, unlike the Syntax Paper Assignment, which asks you to address a very specific set of questions, the Phonology Paper Assignment is much more open-ended. To help you get started, there is a list of possible topics given below, but you are not restricted to these suggestions.

Choice of Speaker.

- 1) The language can be a language that you speak, English included.
- 2) The consultant can be yourself (self-elicitation), or a classmate, or any fluent speaker of the target language.

Tapes: If you wish, you can make a tape for your project, but ideally the tape should be very short. Two minutes is a good target. If your original tape is a long session of naturally recorded speech, I won't have time to listen to it, but you can dub the important parts on a second tape and hand that in. (If you need help with equipment, please consult with me to see what kinds of resources might be available to you.)²

Spectrograms: If you wish, you can create and analyze spectrograms of your data as part of your paper. You can use the relevant equipment and software in the Linguistics Department's Phonetics Lab; depending upon what equipment you own, it is also possible for you to do this kind of work on your own computer. (Please see me as soon as possible if you are interested in this option.)

Sample papers: Two sample papers ("High vowel devoicing in Quebecois" and "Syncope in Namklaw" [note that "Namklaw" is a made-up language!]) may be viewed at the following website:

<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/linguistics/people/hayes/120a/index.htm#samplepapers>

[NOTE: these papers may use slightly more technical terminology than you have been exposed to in Ling 101/301. Don't worry too much about this; for the purposes of your paper, you'll want to focus on roughly 2 or 3 phonological processes, and it shouldn't be too difficult to learn the specific terminology related to them. I will certainly be available to help clarify and explain anything you might need to know.]

*Adopted from an assignment by Bruce Hayes and Heidi Fleischhacker at UCLA.

¹ In 12 point type, single spaced. If you double-space your paper (which is actually preferred), you can hand in more pages.

² Recent technology permits you to embed sound files in your paper, which lets them illustrate the point made in the adjacent text. If you know how to make .wav files, then you can make them clickable entries in your paper using (in Word) Insert • Hyperlink. Then submit the paper electronically.

This website also has links to pages with additional hints/suggestions for topics related to (1) and (6) below. Note that there will be a fair amount of terminology that you are unfamiliar with on these pages. That's ok. The point is for you to use these as sources for paper topic ideas. If something catches your fancy, come and talk to me about it, and we can turn it into a project that is appropriate for a 101/301 level of linguistic knowledge.

Here are some possible topics:

(1) **Replication.** Find a native speaker of a foreign language and a published description/analysis of *some aspect* of the phonology of the language. See if the description can be **replicated** with data from your speaker. There are two possibilities. (a) Your speaker may behave *exactly* as predicted in your reference source material. In this case, concentrate on preparing a clear demonstration, with tape, that the facts and analysis of your reference source are correct. (b) With luck, your speaker will be *different* in some ways from what your reference source describes. Provide a revised, or entirely new analysis that fits your speaker.

(2) **Study of Taped Data Corpus.** Same as above, but instead of elicited data use a recorded sample of spontaneous speech. This is helpful in getting free variation.

(3) **Toddlers.** The speech of small children differs from that of adults in a way that is mostly predictable. That is, it is possible to write a set of phonological rules (often ordered) that predict the child's forms from the adult forms, up to the point of free variation. Find a child of the appropriate level to observe (intelligible, but with lots of differences from adult speech) and analyze and write a few of the rules governing his/her pronunciation. Give plenty of examples and derivations to justify your rules.

Data collection: a videotape of someone (e.g. you) playing with your research subject can give you a bunch of data to start with. Alternatively, you can play with your subject and take notes, though little kids don't usually tolerate the interruption very well. Finally, it *is* marginally possibly simply to elicit data from toddlers. Some little kids will actually comply with a request of the type "Please say ____". If that doesn't work, you can dream up some sort of game that encourages kids to say particular words. Finally, it has been noticed that older brothers and sisters often are very good at persuading their younger siblings to do things. They are often good at translation, too, if you don't understand what your subject is saying.

An outstanding introduction to the phonology of toddlers is *The Acquisition of Phonology* (1973) by Neilson Smith; look at this before you proceed.

(4) **"Transfer"** Find a non-native speaker of some language who speaks that language with an accent. Record some natural speech from your speaker, or elicit individual words, or both. Determine the ways in which the pronunciation of your subject is different from native speech in the target language, and where possible relate the difference to the phonology of the native language of your subject.

Warning: this topic, though often selected, seems to be *hard to do well*. It demands really solid knowledge of the phonology of the first language, which you should read up on. One strategy

that might help is to pick a native speaker who speaks a language you know well as a second language.

(5) **“Wug” testing.** Find a speaker of a language that has substantial alternations in paradigms which have been subjected to a published phonological analysis. Think up new nonsense words to test the validity of the analysis, and to see how speakers come up with underlying forms when not all crucial information is present. (Note that this technique can also be applied as part of a more general project.)

(6) **Dialect Imitation.** Find a speaker who can imitate another dialect of her language. Your goal is to analyze your speaker’s imitation ability as a sort of “mini-phonology.” (Be warned that this type of project is more technical than it might at first sound).

You should talk to me about your project before you start your research.

It is a requirement (5% of the final grade) that your term paper topic be pre-approved by me.

Approval is obtained when I utter the words to you “I hereby approve your topic.” I will utter these words (and record it in the grade spreadsheet) after (a) you’ve told me what you are going to work on; (b) I’ve decided it’s doable; and (c) I’ve given whatever advice I can think of.

No matter which topic you pick, a central goal should be **to show that you are able to apply some of the analytic techniques that you have learned in Linguistics 101/301.** Your paper should describe data systematically and, where possible with the theories you have, write formalized rules. It should not make mistakes like referring to letters rather than sounds, saying that a language is particularly “precise” or “beautiful”, or getting morphological and phonological rules confused. (Warning: reference sources from the library sometimes do these things. Be careful!) Papers will be graded (by me) on how much they show that you’ve learned something, and on thoughtfulness, organization, imagination, and quality of writing.

Good sources for reference material on your target language: (a) the UW MadCat Library catalogue; (b) The MLA Bibliography. This may be accessed from the UW Library website; look for the databases under “Journals, Magazines, and Newspapers.” (The MLA Bibliography allows you to search through individual articles.); (c) *The World’s Major Languages*, by Bernard Comrie.

NOTE: Since Linguistics 101 is only an introductory level course, there’s lots of stuff you haven’t been taught, and therefore some of the reference sources will contain things you don’t understand. Bring the book to office hours and I can help.