Term Paper Assignment

Write a term paper of about 8 pages, illustrating the sounds of some language that you cannot speak. The paper should be based on the speech of fluent native speaker of the target language, whom you will recruit to serve as your consultant. Include with your paper a CD that illustrates the sounds of the language, as spoken by your consultant.

The goal of the project is to give you an opportunity to practice your skills of listening to and transcribing the speech sounds of a language other than English or your native language. You will also get experience working with phonemes and allophones, in extracting facts from a reference source, and in writing up an original research paper.

For a sample paper and other information about the project, visit http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/103/TermPaper.htm.

Here are the steps involved in a Linguistics 103 term project. The notations for WEEKS show a recommended schedule for working on the project without having a frantic rush at any one time.

1. WEEKS 1-2. Choose a speaker and language for your project. Do not use a speaker who has already been studied, and do not use a language you speak. I will give extra consideration to projects on languages that are less familiar or more difficult (e.g. tone languages). Be sure that your consultant is a native speaker who still speaks the language fluently, and has some time to work with you. The speaker should be able to come to the Linguistics Department to make a recording; this will produce a recording that is much easier to transcribe. It helps if both you and the consultant can read the orthography (spelling system) of the language.

2. WEEK 3. Find a reference source (by which I mean a published book or journal article) on the phonetics of the language, or (if nothing is available) on some closely related language. You want something that lists and describes the sounds of your language, ideally including a description of all the variants of each sound in different contexts.

It’s possible that a good source has already been found and placed on reserve in Powell. You can take it out for a couple hours and Xerox what you need. To consult the Linguistics 103 reserve list, visit http://catalog.library.ucla.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?PAGE=rbSearch&DB=local/ and select this course.

1 A native speaker is one who learned the language no later than early childhood and has continued to have the opportunity to speak the language since then. One way to check for purposes of this course is to ask: “Do native speakers of your language think you speak with an accent?”

2 Ideally: I. Session 1, one hour, draft word list II. Session 2, 45 minutes, revise the list III. recording, 20 minutes in Campbell Hall. Less is possible in a pinch.
If that doesn’t work out, try this: (a) *Patterns of Sounds* by Ian Maddieson, on reserve in Powell, which contains charts of the phonemes and references to books, for many (but not all) languages. (c) *The World’s Major Languages* (ed. by Bernard Comrie), on reserve, has short sketches and references for about 50 languages. (d) *Handbook of the IPA*, on reserve, with phonetic sketches of 29 languages; (e) textbooks that teach the language; (e) The UCLA online library catalog (http://catalog.library.ucla.edu/); (f) Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com/) and Google Books (http://books.google.com). The latter source usually won’t give you the whole book, but you can then get the book from the library.

You must use at least one authentic peer-reviewed source, by which I mean: something that appeared in a published book or scholarly journal. Sometimes amateur web sources (like Wikipedia) can be very good, and you may use them to supplement your main research. But I thinks it’s important to get practice in finding traditional sources, which I why I am emphasizing them.

The better the published material you find, the less time you’ll have to spend with your consultant. But don’t try to read every book in the library. They are bound to disagree with each other, and you will get confused. What you want is to find is a good source (i.e. careful and detailed), rather than conduct a fishing expedition. Feel free to bring sources to my office hours (M 11-12, Thr. 2-3 and by appt.) and I will assess them for you.

Dictionaries usually don’t have a systematic presentation of the sound system, but they certainly can be helpful for finding relevant words. The UCLA library has many, many foreign language dictionaries.

The earlier you look for your reference sources, the less likely you will find all the material you want already checked out of the library.

When you don’t find a book on the library shelf, don’t despair! Often, it’s checked out to another reader, and you can have it called in from them (http://www.library.ucla.edu/service/162.cfm). Also, it is sometimes possible to get hard-to-obtain stuff on interlibrary loan (http://www2.library.ucla.edu/service/ill.cfm).

3. **WEEKS 4 AND 5.** Make a tentative list of the phonemes of the language, their allophones, and lots of words illustrating them (including vowels, consonants, and suprasegmentals). Make sure you understand phonemes and allophones before you do this.³ Your list should include minimal pairs or sets for phonemes where possible. Use as a model the lists used in language demonstrations in class. The list should be short, and should work by this formula:

- Illustrate the consonants with a minimal set.
- Illustrate the vowels with a minimal set.
- Illustrate the tones (if any) with a minimal set
- Provide a small set of words illustrating allophones

• A sentence that includes several words from the list

If your reference source does not describe allophones (or even if it does), download and study this document:  http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/103/FindingAllophones.pdf.

Since at this point you are preparing a list to work on with your consultant, you should have extra examples, since some words are bound not to work out. The more work you do now, the more efficiently you can spend the time you have with your consultant. Every linguist regards consultant time as precious!

4. WEEKS 6 AND 7. Once you have a tentative word list, you can meet with your consultant. Go over the list with your consultant in one or more preliminary sessions, noting with IPA just how your consultant pronounces the words you have assembled. You may ask the consultant to help in finding more or better example words. Be opportunistic: if you notice things in your consultant’s speech now, you can include relevant words on your list and thus in your paper.

Consider the consultant as the authority on the language. Do not try to convince him/her to pronounce things the way the book has them, and do convince him/her that you want a normal, everyday pronunciation. Consultants are sometimes afraid that their native dialect is not “good enough” for what you “want,” and that your book must be “right.”

It may help to go home, work on an improved list, and meet with the speaker again. Be aware that most languages vary quite a bit from dialect to dialect, and don’t let differences between your consultant’s speech and your reference source startle you. What you want to achieve is an accurate description of your consultant’s speech, NOT a rehash of your reference source. In fact, accurate description of these differences (when they occur) is one hallmark of a good term paper.

A copy of your word list (not necessarily the final version) is due in class on Wed. 2/22.

5. WEEK 8. Make a final, written version of the list, choosing from your long original list a shorter list of words that illustrate just the phonemic contrasts and the significant allophones. As in the class demonstration, start with examples of the basic sounds, then move on to interesting allophones. For difficult, unusual, or other interesting sounds, add extra words in minimal pairs with more usual sounds. For example, use minimal pairs to prove that a particular place of articulation in your language really is distinct from the other places of articulation. You might want to think of it this way: use your final list (and the recording of your consultant reading it) to prove to me that the book’s description of the sounds is right (or wrong) for this particular speaker.

The length limit for the list is as follows: number of segmental phonemes, plus number of stress and tone contrasts, plus 25%. Examples: American English (in the IPA Handbook analysis) has 39 segmental phonemes and phonemic stress; so \(39 + 1 \times 1.25 = 50\) words. Cantonese (in the IPA Handbook analysis) has 42 segmental phonemes and 9 tones, so \((42 + 9) \times 1.25 = 64\) words.
Be sure you and your consultant have agreed on how the words are to be written for the recording session: native orthography, romanization, or whatever.

6. Arrange an appointment for your consultant to come to the Linguistics Department to make a recording. When the time comes for this, all arrangements will be handled in class.

The recording will normally be made on a CD in .wav format, which you turn in with your paper. For full directions on how to make the recording, see the class handout entitled “Recordings for Term Projects.” This will be given out in class at the appropriate time.

7. WEEK 9. Listen to your recording and make a careful phonetic transcription. Your transcription should reflect the actual pronunciations on your recording, and will be graded as such. Compare the two pronunciations on the recording with each other (very often, they’re not the same, and you get credit for noticing this). Also, compare your consultant’s pronunciation with what you had expected when you made up your list. You can improve your transcription in delicate places by using acoustic software, which will be demonstrated in class.

If you make a CD recording and don’t have a computer equipped for sound, you can go to the CLICC Lab in Powell and borrow headphones.

Please do not attempt to rearrange the words on a new disk; stick with the order you recorded them. (Trust me — I’ve seen plenty of projects sink into chaos when people have tried to do this.)

9. WEEK 10. Write the paper. The complete term paper will include

a. The recording, on a labeled CD, placed in a labeled container or envelope.

b. Vowel and consonant charts, in standard format, showing the phonemes. Place the charts within the text, at the most relevant spot. Include your allophones on the chart as well, using a different color or in parentheses to distinguish them.

c. A transcription, with a phonemic transcription as well as a narrow phonetic one (indicating the sounds that the consultant actually produced when making this recording), and English glosses; and if possible, an orthographic version in the language’s own writing system. It is very important that the transcription have the same word order as the recording, since the transcription is graded by listening to the recording.

d. The transcriptions should appear embedded within a written account of the phonetic characteristics of the language, including the name and background of the consultant, the language, where it is spoken, comments on the distribution of sounds, detailed descriptions of unusual sounds, or remarks about conflicts with your reference source. Please “interleave” transcriptions and text; see the sample paper (http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/103/Noisiveletian.pdf) for how to do this.
e. Xerox or print the reference source from which you got your data and include this copy. If this is more than ten pages, Xerox just the ten most important pages.

f. Lastly, please email an electronic copy of your paper and sound file to me at bhayes@humnet.ucla.edu.

The paper should be fairly closely related to the Linguistics 103 course material. So, don’t waste your space with a long introduction covering background on the language, and avoid repeating naïve or imprecise terminology from your source material.

Papers will be graded (by your prof.) on the following basis: focus on speaker rather than reference sources, accuracy of transcription, knowledge of course material, organization, clarity and correctness of writing.4 Points are awarded for bravery, in particular, for going out on a limb in seeking an accurate and detailed description of your own speaker.

**Deadlines:**

- A preliminary report on the term project, 2% of the final grade, due **Mon., 2/6**
- A preliminary version of your recording script, 2% of the final grade, due **Wed. 2/22.**
- The paper itself, due **Monday 3/19**

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4 Please do write the paper in standard scholarly prose; it’s meant to be practice in writing this way.