

Term Paper Assignment

1. Assignment

The term paper is intended to be a first exposure to doing phonological research 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 not be too much longer than 8 printed pages.¹

Due date. The due date is 12/7 at 5:00 p.m. (Wednesday of finals week). Please both submit a hard copy and email me an electronic copy (Word or similar format).

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.
- 3) If you've recently done a Linguistics 103 paper, you can use the same consultant, if he/she is willing and you're curious to follow up on the language you did. But be careful not to submit a 103 paper—this is a phonology course, not a phonetics course.

Recordings: If you wish, you can make a recording for your project (for which you may use a Linguistics Department sound booth²), but ideally the recording should be very short. Two minutes is a good target. If your original recording is a long session of naturally recorded speech, I won't have time to listen to it, but you can copy the important parts onto a second recording, or make sound files.

Sample papers. Two samples are posted on my web site. Visit:
<http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/120a/index.htm#samplepapers>.

In general, it's a good idea here to aim for depth rather than breadth: a careful and convincing study of a smaller topic rather than superficial study of many topics.

Often people think they will cover Topic A when they start working with a speaker, then discover Topic B in the same language, which turns out to be more interesting. This is normal; just check with me before you switch over to Topic B.

2. Possible topics by area

This covers type of topic. For topics by language (various commonly spoken languages), download <http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/120A/PaperTopicsLanguageByLanguage.pdf>.

(1) **Replication.** Find a native speaker of a foreign language, a published description/analysis of *some aspect* of the phonology of the language, and 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 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.

¹ In 12 point type, single spaced. If you want to double-space (which is very helpful, and leaves more space for reader comments), you can take more pages.

² Ask Mr. Tehrani in Campbell Hall 2101F (Phonetics Lab).

For some possible “replicatory” topics and reference sources on phenomena in various languages, go to my web site and download <http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/120a/ReplicatoryTermPaperTopics.pdf>. You can also ask for help with finding a topic of this kind.

A great virtue of this topic is that it fits well with the content of the course; you will not have much trouble using the course material (which is a priority) in doing your paper.

(2) **Study of recorded data corpus.** Same as above, but instead of elicited data use a recorded sample of speech. If you are studying a rule that applies often, you can just take a sample of natural speech (for example, your speaker talking on the phone to someone). Or, to get more control of your material, you can write a prose passage that has lots of places for the rule to apply and have your speaker read it a couple of times.

Once you’ve examined your corpus carefully you will usually have things that you will want to recheck by going back to your speaker.

(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 obvious 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 sometimes don’t tolerate the interruption very well. Finally, it *is* marginally possible 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) **Children learning to read.** Use English spelling as a probe of their phonemic system. A model paper is Sarah C. Gudschinsky, Harold Popovich and Frances Popovich (1970) Native reaction and phonetic similarity in Maxakalí phonology. *Language* 46:77-88, in the UCLA library.

(6) **“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. This can be done as part of a more general project. Wug testing is taught in Week 6 of the course; to get ready earlier read Chapter 9 of the text.

I’ve wug-tested a bit in my research over the years; if you’re curious to see wug-test studies with me as co-author, you can find some at <http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/HungarianVH/index.htm>, <http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/rulesvsanalogy/index.html>, and <http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/hayes/Segenvspandiph/index.htm>

(6) **“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 thoroughly. One strategy that might help is to pick a native speaker who speaks a language you know well as a second language; that way, you can make use of some of the course material on English.

One strategy that seems to help is to do just one aspect of transfer (one rule, or one part of the phoneme system), in greater depth.

(7) **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." For details on this topic (which is rather more technical than it might at first sound), go to the course Web page and click on "Dialect imitation".

(8) **Phonological language games.** Many languages have phonological language games, in which speech is disguised for fun by applying extra rules to it. The most common language game in English is Pig Latin ([pɪg lætɪn] → [ɪgpeɪ ætɪnlɛɪ]). Often the rules of the language game interact in interesting ways with the rules of phonology proper. Figure out, analyze, illustrate these rules and their interactions.

(9) **Loanword adaptation.** Can you come up with rules that predict what happens when a word from Language A is borrowed into Language B? This works better when B *constantly* borrows words from A (as with Japanese from English). In such cases the rules for adapting foreign words tend to be *productive* and you can even ask your consultant, "If your language borrowed word X, how would you say it?" Don't hesitate to cut down the topic to just a few, well-analyzed substitutions.

3. Reference sources

You should begin your project by examining earlier research on your topic. I do accept on-line reference sources, but since they are written mostly by amateurs I require that you cite at least one source that (whether online or printed) has been *peer-reviewed*; that is, examined and judged by scholars as a condition for publication. You can peer-reviewed sources at: (a) **UCLA Library Catalog** (<http://catalog.library.ucla.edu/>); (b) **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.com/>); (c) **my office hours**. (d) *The World's Major Languages* (1987), by Bernard Comrie, Powell reserve desk.

4. Pedagogical goals of the assignment

No matter which topic you pick, a central goal should be **to show that you have learned something in the course**. 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 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, mechanics included.

5. Discussing your project

You should talk to me about your project before you start your research. You can do this in the class break, but it's better to come to my office hours (M 3-4, F 2-3, and by appointment), where I can access my books and computer for more information.

Since Linguistics 120A is only the first course in the UCLA phonology sequence, 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 we can probably help.

It is a requirement (2% of 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 records) 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.