

450 Term Paper Instructions*

Goal: this project is designed to give you an opportunity to learn how to conduct library research on a language, to practice your skills of listening to and transcribing the speech sounds of a language other than English or your native language, and to practice your phonological rule writing skills. It is also an opportunity to learn about a language that interests you, and to get to know the community of speakers in Seattle.

Here are the steps involved in a Linguistics 450 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. Try not to use a speaker who has already been studied, do not use a language you speak natively, do not use a language that you have already studied. 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, has some time to work with you, and can come to the Phonetics Lab to make a tape recording, preferably during a weekday. It is best if both you and the consultant can read the orthography of the language.

2. WEEK 3. Find a source (e.g. a 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. Some good starting points: (a) *Patterns of Sounds* by Ian Maddieson which contains charts of the phonemes and references to books, for many (but not all) languages. (b) *The World's Major Languages* (ed. by Bernard Comrie) has short sketches and references for about 50 languages. (c) The UW Libraries catalog on line: look for dictionaries, grammars, or textbooks that contain a section on pronunciation. (d) If these don't work, try the *MLA Bibliography*. Unlike the UW catalogue, MLA lists articles in scholarly journals.

The more published material you find, the less time you'll have to spend with your speaker. 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 one or two really *good* sources (i.e. careful and detailed), rather than conducting a fishing expedition.

The earlier you do this, the less likely you will find all the material you want already checked out of the library. Also, if you really do it early, you might be able to get hard-to-obtain stuff on interlibrary loan.

* This assignment is based on one that I did while a linguistics student at UCLA. The instructions are a modified version of those used by Prof. Bruce Hayes.

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). Your list should include minimal pairs or sets for phonemes where possible. Try to find similar words comparing all of the consonants, and all of the vowels. Then find words that are supposed to illustrate each kind of allophonic variation in the language. Since at this point you are preparing a list to work on with your speaker, you should have lots of *extra* examples, since some words are bound not to work out. Your goal at this point is to compile examples of the basic phonetic facts and to be prepared to find any interesting phonetic phenomena in your speaker's speech. If your book does not describe allophones, you should prepare words that show consonants and vowels in different contexts and positions, so that you can discover the allophones for yourself. The more work you do now, the less time you will probably need with your speaker in person.

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 how *your* consultant pronounces the words you have assembled. You may ask the consultant to help in finding more or better example words. Consider the consultant as the authority on the language, and incorporate any suggestions that he/she provides. 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." You may want 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.

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 demonstrations, 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 tape 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. You should not have more than 60-80 words total in your list unless the language has an unusually large number of phonemes. You may want to have your list checked over in office hours by me at this point. 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 Phonetics Lab to record a tape.

The recording will be made on a cassette tape, which belongs to the Phonetics Lab. You use this cassette while working on your project, and turn it in with your paper. If you want your own copy of the tape to keep, bring a blank cassette with you to your recording session, and a second copy will be made for you along with our copy. Please ask your speaker for permission to preserve and use the recordings to teach the sounds of the language in future classes. If they don't want to have the tape preserved, the recording will be destroyed after the recording.

7. Shortly before the lab appointment, let the consultant practice reading the final version of the list. (Do not waste my time or your consultant's time by doing this in the sound booth.) Describe how the list is to be read—who will say the English meanings, etc. Record your speaker with my help or the help of my RA. This step is your class assignment, due during Week 8. The recording should begin with you saying:

“This recording was made on (date) by (your name) as an illustration for a 450 term paper. The consultant's name is (name). He/she is a speaker of (language). (S)he comes from (place, town, country).”

Then the consultant should read the list. Either you or the consultant should give an English gloss (= short translation) for each word. A suggested (but not required) format would be: *item number - English gloss - word once - word again* (you may use three repetitions if you like). After the words have been said with an accompanying gloss, have the consultant read through the whole list again without glosses. Be sure to have the consultant pause between repetitions of the word or the words may run together.

8. WEEK 9. Listen to the tape (you may use equipment in the LLC for this, or your own cassette player at home), and make a careful phonetic transcription. Your transcription should reflect the actual pronunciations on your tape, and will be graded as such. Compare the two or three pronunciations on the tape with each other (very often, they're not the same, and you get brownie points for noticing this). Also, compare your consultant's pronunciation with what you had expected when you made up your list. I suggest organizing words on the list in groups by place or by manner. (for example, follow the IPA places starting with labial sounds, stops first, then nasals, then fricatives, etc.)

9. WEEK 10. Write the paper. The complete term paper will consist of

a. The recording, in a labeled box.

b. A transcription page with four columns: 1) the item number, 2) a phonemic or broad phonetic transcription, 3) a narrow phonetic one (indicating the sounds that the consultant actually produced when making this recording), and 4) English glosses; and if possible, a fifth column with an orthographic version in the language's own writing system. It is important that the transcription have the same word order as the tape, since the transcription is graded by listening to the tape.

c. Vowel and consonant charts, showing at least the phonemes and possibly (in a different color or in parentheses) some major interesting allophones, if any.

d. A short account of the phonetic characteristics of the language (about 4-5 typed pages, double-spaced), including the 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. A sample of this part of the project is available.

The paper should show you've learned something. So, avoid a long introduction covering background on the language (not part of this course), and avoid repeating naive or imprecise terminology from your source material. Also we are learning the IPA so of course use the IPA in both your broad and narrow transcriptions. Any variance from the IPA conventions should be approved by me before the paper is written.

Papers are graded by the prof. (me).