ENG 412D/612D: Introduction to Phonology

Professor: TBD  Email & phone: TBD  Office hours: TBD


Additional readings:


Prerequisites: ENG 281 or ENG 282 or ENG 412A/ ENG 612A or SPA 320; ENG 303 or junior standing.

Catalog description: Theory and structure of sound systems of language, including the sociolinguistic variation within dialects of English.

Course objectives:

*This course satisfies Silver Core Objective 9: Students will be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems by explaining how science relates to problems of societal concern; be able to distinguish between sound and unsound interpretations of scientific information; employ cogent reasoning methods in their own examinations of problems and issues; and understand the applications of science and technology in societal context.*

Linguistics is the scientific study of language, a universal feature of human social and cognitive behavior. Phonology is that discipline of linguistics concerned with describing and analyzing the patterns and structure of speech sounds within the grammar of human language. Every speaker has an implicit knowledge of how sounds are organized in his or her native language. Phonologists are interested in discovering, modeling, and explaining that knowledge from both cognitive and social perspectives, and this course will examine phonological phenomena from both of these perspectives as well. This course will introduce students to the concepts of phonological analysis, generative phonological theory, and aspects of socially motivated variation in phonological behavior. Throughout the course, we will heavily emphasize the application of the scientific method and critical thinking skills to our analysis of linguistic data, our formulation and evaluation of hypotheses, and our consideration of competing theoretical models.

In the first segment of the course, we will review the essentials of phonetic description, as well as the physiological and acoustic components of human speech. We will use the free software Praat (www.praat.org) to conduct acoustic analysis of English speech sounds, with an emphasis on the analysis of vowels. We will then turn our attention to the descriptive analysis of language data: what sounds are significant in a particular language? What rules govern their organization in that language?

In the second segment of the course, we will consider contemporary theories of phonology, with a focus on rule-based generative models rooted in the Chomskyan tradition. Students will be asked to apply these theoretical models to datasets drawn from a wide variety of languages, and to evaluate their relative strengths and weaknesses in accounting for observed phenomena. We will also consider how phonological patterns can change over time, and consider physiological, social, and cognitive explanations for these changes.

In the final segment of the course, we will turn our attention to the ways in which detailed acoustic analysis of large speech samples can help us to understand how language users display systematic variations in their phonological behavior as markers of social identity, and how society perceives and responds to these markers. Social variables which govern variations in phonological behavior include geographic origin, ethnicity, gender, age, social status, and sexual orientation.
Student learning outcomes:
Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to demonstrate in class discussion, exams, and final papers, their mastery of the following key concepts and skills:

1. The use of the International Phonetic Alphabet to transcribe words at the phonetic and phonemic levels.
2. Identify the physiological components of speech production.
3. Describe key aspects of the acoustic nature of speech sounds.
2. Use the acoustic analysis software Praat to answer questions about the acoustic nature of speech sounds.
3. Explain the concepts allophone, phoneme, and complementary distribution, and apply them in an analysis.
4. Explain the relationship between phonetic and phonological descriptions of speech.
5. Identify and describe common phonological processes.
6. Distinguish between sound and unsound interpretations of scientific information in the following ways:
   a. by applying the scientific method to formulate, evaluate, and revise their own hypotheses about the phonological phenomena observed in datasets, and
   b. by comparing, evaluating, and synthesizing scholarly literature representing competing views of phonological phenomena.
7. Employ distinctive (binary) features to describe phonological segments and to write phonological rules.
8. Analyze phonological structure at suprasegmental levels, including syllables and non-local phenomena.
9. Explain the roles of physiology, aerodynamics, and language contact in phonological evolution
10. Explain how the descriptive and analytical mechanisms presented in the course relate to problems of societal concern, for instance by describing how varieties of English and other languages differ in their phonological structure and behavior according to sociolinguistic variables such as origin, ethnicity, gender, and age.

Evaluation & grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade components</th>
<th>Letter grade scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework: 35%</td>
<td>A 93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final project: 20%</td>
<td>A- 90-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exams: 20% x 2</td>
<td>B+ 87-89</td>
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<td>Attendance &amp; participation</td>
<td>B- 80-82</td>
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<td>C+ 77-79</td>
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<td>C 73-76</td>
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<td>A- 70-72</td>
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<td>A 50-49</td>
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<td>F &lt; 50</td>
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Homework: There will be approximately seven graded homework assignments distributed over the semester, equally weighted. Active collaboration on all HW assignments is encouraged. However, each student is responsible for making an equitable contribution to any discussion, and must prepare and submit his/her OWN write-up. Duplicate write-ups will be considered to have been plagiarized.

Graduate students will be asked to complete supplemental homework, consisting of additional questions, data set, or original research, in addition to the work required for undergraduates.

Exams: There will be two exams. Each exam will be worth 20% of your final grade.

Late work and makeup exams will not be acceptable without arrangements made in advance of the due date.

Term projects: Undergraduate students will be asked to find at least three academic works (such as journal articles and book chapters) addressing some issue in phonology (chosen from a provided list), summarize the arguments and evidence presented in each of those works, and present a final conclusion on the basis of those arguments and evidence in the form of a carefully crafted and thoroughly cited 6-8 page paper.

Potential topics include the following:

- The sonority hierarchy
- The category of rhotic consonants
- The segmental status of affricates
- Coronal stops in American English
- The tense/lax distinction in vowels
- Phonetic precursors for tone

Presentations: Students will discuss their project findings in brief oral presentations near the end of the term.
**Graduate students** will be asked to conduct an in-depth investigation of some phonological problem or issue, chosen in consultation with me, in a thoroughly researched and documented paper of 10-12 pages. A preliminary bibliography will be due from all students by October 31. Additional information about the term project will be provided in due course.

**Attendance & Preparation:** Regular attendance & thorough preparation for class discussions are essential to gain & retain a firm grasp on the course material. Thus, all students will be expected to have read the assigned material, and that they will be prepared to discuss any assigned practice problems. Attendance and preparation are worth 5% of the course grade. Any number of unexcused absences greater than 3 will jeopardize that portion of your grade. To excuse an absence, either arrange it with me in advance (preferred, e.g. a work or university-related conflict), or offer a solid explanation afterward (if absolutely necessary, e.g. a medical emergency).

**WebCampus:** Readings and homework assignments will be announced in class & posted on WebCampus (https://wcl.unr.edu/), together with certain handouts and supplementary exercises. A general overview of our weekly readings is provided on the last page of this syllabus.

**Academic dishonesty:** Cheating, plagiarism, or otherwise submitting work under false pretenses constitutes academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. There is a zero-tolerance policy for academic dishonesty, and any student found to have committed it will automatically fail this course. For more details, see the University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog. Read UNR’s policy on student academic standards here: http://www.unr.edu/student-conduct/policies/university-policies-and-guidelines/academic-standards/policy

**Students with disabilities:** Appropriate accommodations will be offered to students who need them. But first you should speak with the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building, Suite 101, on the Web at http://www.unr.edu/drc) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate documentation. All accommodations MUST first be approved through the DRC. Please stop by their office or call (775) 784-6000 to make an appointment with a disability specialist.

**Use of electronic devices:** It is strongly preferred that students not use laptop computers, tablets, smartphones, or similar devices during class. Please plan on taking notes on paper. (Students needing such devices to accommodate a disability will be exempt from this policy.)

**Audio & video recording:** Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

**Using academic services:** Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (775) 784-4422, Tutoring Center (775) 784-6801, and University Writing Center (775) 784-6030. These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services.

Unfortunately, no tutoring services are currently provided for this course. Nevertheless, help will certainly be available whenever you need it; you are firmly encouraged to take advantage of this availability. Please bear in mind that seeking help outside of class is a hallmark of a responsible and successful student.

**Course evaluations:** Your opportunity to evaluate this course will appear two weeks before the last day of classes in the form of a new course on your WebCampus home page. This new course contains only the evaluation survey. Thoughtful, judicious responses to these online course evaluations are extremely important to me and to the Department of English, so please take a few minutes to complete your course evaluation when it becomes available. The evaluation is completely anonymous and your comments can never be connected with your name. Instructors cannot see the evaluation course on WebCampus and will not have access to the contents of these evaluations until after final grades have been posted.
Preliminary schedule of readings and assignments
Below is a rough outline of topics to be discussed throughout the term. Up-to-date readings, assignments, and test dates will be announced in class and posted on WebCampus: https://wcl.unr.edu/.

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phonetics review</td>
<td>Review of phonetics</td>
<td>Th: HW 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Odden ch. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Praat</td>
<td>Praat intro handouts</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Praat</td>
<td>Praat intro handouts</td>
<td>Th: HW 2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The phonemic principle</td>
<td>Odden ch. 2</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Phonological processes</td>
<td>Schane Ch 5</td>
<td>Th: HW 3</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Feature theory</td>
<td>Odden ch. 3</td>
<td>Th: HW 4</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Underlying forms &amp; morphophonology</td>
<td>Odden ch. 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Morphophonology</td>
<td>Odden ch. 4</td>
<td>Tu: HW 5</td>
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<td><strong>Midterm exam</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rules and rule ordering</td>
<td>Odden ch. 5</td>
<td>Th: <strong>Project bibliography due</strong></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Phonological typology</td>
<td>Odden ch. 7</td>
<td>Th: HW 6</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Nonlinear phenomena and autosegmental</td>
<td>Odden ch. 9</td>
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<td>representations</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Diachrony &amp; phonologization</td>
<td>Ohala 1993, 1997</td>
<td>Th: HW 7</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Sociophonetic variation: Dialect &amp; ethnicity</td>
<td>Fridland et al. 2014</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Sociophonetic variation: Gender, age, and</td>
<td>Podesva 2011</td>
<td>Th: HW 8</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Student presentations</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Student presentations</td>
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<td><strong>Tu: Final projects due</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Final exam</strong></td>
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