

Phonological term project

The goal of this project is for you to develop your phonological writing and research skills. As you become a better writer, your skills at describing patterns should also improve.

Possible term project topics

There are lots of options for the term project. Below is a list of some possibilities. While there are many options for the term paper, some are inherently more challenging and worth more points, similar to the “start value” or “level of difficulty” in sports competitions. Harder ones (potentially worth more points) are flagged with *. Some of these are described in more detail below.

- Literature survey
 - ❖ possible for well studied topics (e.g. Spanish syllable structure)
 - ❖ minimum of 3 references to be reviewed and synthesized
- “The rest of the story” (more on some data set referred to in lecture or in the textbook)
 - ❖ relatively easy to find topic
- *Description of some aspect of the synchronic phonology of some language.
 - ❖ segmental (consonants and vowels) and/or prosodic (stress, tone) phenomena which interact with morphology
 - ❖ can be hard to find something to write about
 - ❖ *contrasts, interaction of vowels and glides
 - ❖ *other interacting phonological phenomena (two or more)
 - ❖ *epenthesis and/or deletion rules are also a good bet
 - ❖ syllable structure (restrictions on phoneme sequencing: C clusters, vowel sequences, long vowels, etc.)
- *Description of some aspect of the diachronic phonology of some language or language family
 - ❖ (same options as with synchronic description project)
 - ❖ (harder than synchronic description project because more data/linguistic knowledge required)
- *Description of some aspect of the emerging phonology of a child
 - ❖ hard because data can be hard to come by
 - ❖ hard also because you may have to sort through masses of data
- A phonology problem for students at your level, similar to those at end of Hayes chs. 6, 7, 8, or 13
 - ❖ must include solution
 - ❖ well studied topics like Spanish syllable structure could be turned into phonology problems

Collection of new data is not required for this project. You may draw on data from your own native language, or you may transcribe data from a speaker of a language (probably one you already know reasonably well). For whatever language you pick, you should have at least two sources (there is no upper limit on the number of sources you can consult for this project); more required for literature survey type of project.

Do you have something else in mind? Talk to me about it.

More on literature surveys, phonological descriptions, and “the rest of the story”

Most students will probably select one of these two options. If your interests are more experimental than qualitative, a literature survey is probably your best option.

Literature surveys

A literature survey is intended to review previous approaches to some general phenomenon, rather than present an analysis of some specific set of data. A literature survey (of varying degrees of comprehensiveness) is always the first section in a linguistic article or book. A sophisticated literature review is not a simple chronologically organized summary of identified sources, but is organized in a more interesting way, such as around research questions, areas of agreement or disagreement, theoretical approach, etc. A sophisticated literature review is really only possible when one has read (and thought) widely about a topic.

Vance 1987 is mostly a literature survey of Japanese phonology. Note the major section headings within Ch. 9 ‘The Velar Nasal’:

- 9.1 Historical Background
- 9.2 Modern Standard Japanese
- 9.3 Phonetic Motivation
- 9.4 Medial Voiced Velar Stops
- 9.5 Initial Velar Nasals
- 9.6 Natural Process versus Learned Rule
- 9.7 Consequences for Natural Phonology

There are probably over 100 citations of different works in the literature in that chapter alone. Vance, through his expert knowledge of the literature, was able to organize his chapter by research questions and descriptive problems involving the velar nasal, not by sources consulted. Vance’s type of organization is something to aspire to in a literature survey.

The rest of the story

With this option you provide “the rest of the story” for something that catches your attention in one of the secondary sources in this class, typically the textbook, lecture slides, or in-class data analysis. This is an exercise in going beyond the view of the language as presented in the secondary source. In all these cases, the textbook, lecture slides or problem set will provide only a small part of the information concerning the language. You are to go to the primary sources and find out if the presentation given in the textbook (etc.) is representative or misleading. What is really going on?

Your write-up should begin with a section reviewing what the textbook, lecture or data set says about the problem. You should be clear about where the secondary source ends and where your own investigation into the primary source begins. Also, as this is a phonology paper, be sure to include sufficient data in your paper (probably presented within the text rather than set off from the text, since this is a short paper) to illustrate your discussion and motivate any analyses that you or others might come up with.

Note: one data set off limits for this assignment is Lango (ch. 2 and ch. 6 problems). This is because Hayes presents virtually all of the story for you.

Phonological description

A phonological description paper will typically be organized and written around a set of data. The goal of the paper is to present an analysis of a set of data. Previous analyses may be reviewed, as with a literature survey, so the difference between literature review and phonological description papers can be subtle. Typically, in a phonological description paper previous analyses will be presented in a section after the presentation of data. One of the tasks of a phonological description paper is to sort through the various analyses and argue for the best one, usually a novel/original analysis.

Length limit

451 (W) students: 10 pages; 551/575E students: 12 pages. Papers should be double spaced, using 12 point font. References are excluded from the page limit. I will stop reading at the page limit.

Deadlines

Refer to class syllabus for exact dates.

- First thoughts on term paper topic (beginning of class survey)
- Optional meeting with me to talk about your interests and ideas
- Submission of term paper topic (one-paragraph to one-page statement of what you intend to work on, including source and extent of data)
- Feedback on term paper topic. Approval must be given (to be recorded in Gradebook) in order to proceed.
- Required meeting with me to talk about your first draft, before first draft is submitted. You will be docked points if you fail to schedule this meeting.
- First draft submitted
- Comments on first drafts from me
- Final draft due (finals week)

Underlined text in any of the above bullet points means that this is a deadline for you. This is something that needs to be submitted to an electronic collection site by a certain date and time. The consequences for being late with *any* of these deadlines will be a 1% per hour late deduction from your final grade on the term paper.

In the past, the main reasons I have not approved term paper topics has been an apparent lack of data on your topic; e.g. if you select a topic in first language acquisition and fail to convince me that you have access to sufficient data.

Formatting

All work related to the term paper must be typed (not hand-written).

Writing tips

Newmeyer 1988, a handout on how to write linguistic papers, gives many tips on what to do and not to do when writing linguistics papers. Read it twice, once now before you start to write and again before you post your first draft.

I have some mss. on writing conventions in linguistics which are posted and you will read from time to time.

Your project should include a list of references cited (more on this later).

Grading

When it comes time for me to assign points to your final draft, I will print it out and write comments on it. I will also mark up and attach the following lists, showing the general categories of rights and wrongs in your paper.

I start with a base score of 20 points, then add points to it for things done well and subtract points for things not done well. The maximum possible score is 25 points.

Points will be awarded for

Writing

- clear writing
- good organization (e.g. insightful section headings), outline provided
- finding, reading and citing relevant sources beyond the minimum number

Phonological

- phonologically sophisticated writing
- thoughtful presentation of data, captions included
- complexity of phenomenon/phenomena described (one or more * topics)
- original data analysis (phonological description paper)
- original data collection (most papers do not involve this)

Points will be deducted for

Phonological issues

- data problems
 - unclear presentation of data (hard to see patterns)
 - transcription of data
 - insufficient examples
- analytical problems
 - unclear analysis
 - data-rule mismatch
 - failure to justify URs or reliance on orthography to justify
 - inexplicit or insufficiently explicit reasoning

- misuse of //
- irrelevant information provided
 - discussion of spelling, not phonology
 - discussion of morphology (only), not phonology
- discussion of phonetics instead of phonology; i.e. writing a 450 paper instead of 451 paper (without prior approval)
 - avoid by discussing classes of sounds and/or (apparent) rule order
 - avoid by presenting examples that involve morpheme alternations

Presentation issues

- organization
 - no title
 - no section headings
 - section headings not numbered
 - missing cross-references
 - sections out of sequence
 - redundancy
- citation/reference problems
 - missing content: important contributions to literature not cited
 - references in bibliography not cited in paper
 - work cited missing from bibliography (either in whole or in part)
 - citations missing from text; i.e. data, diagrams or even an idea is taken from some source and no reference is provided
 - year missing from citation
 - inconsistent formatting
 - unnecessarily complex citations (not author-date format)
- data presentation
 - failure to number linguistic examples
 - failure to introduce/explain examples before presenting them
 - proper formatting of data set off from text
 - proper formatting of data in line with text
 - convoluted reference to examples in text
 - absence of tables (needed for complex phenomena)
 - misuse of tables (not needed for simple phenomena)
- writing
 - unclear writing (e.g. unclear referents of proforms like *it*, *this*, etc.)
 - disjointed writing (leaps from idea to another)
 - large number of distracting typos (poor proof-reading)
 - bad page or line breaks

Lateness

- failure to meet deadlines
 - topic submission
 - meet with prof
 - post first draft

- respond to comments
- turn in final draft

General issues

- problems that could have been avoided by paying attention to class presentations handouts (holds of first as well as final drafts)
- font issues (poor proof-reading)
- failure to adhere to page limit (holds of first as well as final drafts)
- failure to number pages

Failure to correct first draft

It is a major annoyance to see that a problem that was spotted in the first draft and needed to be corrected or addressed is still present in the final draft. If you don't understand reviewers' comments, you need to ask for clarification. The first thing I will do before reading your final drafts is reread the comments on your rough drafts.

Newmeyer, Fritz. 1988. Some guidelines for writing linguistics papers, Seattle, Ms.

Vance, Timothy J. 1987. *An Introduction to Japanese Phonology*. Albany: SUNY Press.