

Course objectives

After you complete this course, you should be able to do the following. (Or, “The Minimum That Every Linguistics Graduate Student Should Know About Phonology.”)

I. Fundamentals of phonological analysis

These skills are essential for being able to read and think about phonology in any theoretical framework.

- Recognize and use phonetic symbols and phonological notation
- Identify and describe patterns and generalizations in a phonological data set
- Distinguish between predictable and unpredictable information in a phonological data set, and defend your choice
- Work with a distinctive-feature system and understand what predictions it makes about natural classes and phonological processes

→ Another fundamental phonological objective of the course is for you to start becoming familiar with the kinds of phonological phenomena that occur and the various theoretical approaches that have been taken toward these phenomena.

If you go on in phonology, deepening and broadening your knowledge of these areas will be a long-term goal. In particular, if phonology is part of your MA thesis or future work, it is important for you to pursue this goal by enrolling in further phonology courses, when available, and reading the literature.

II. Basic principles and techniques of Optimality Theory

No linguistic theory is perfect, and neither is OT. However, many phonologists feel that OT and its descendants are the best theoretical tools we currently have for exploring phonological patterns and their significance, so we will focus on OT and related frameworks in this course. Moreover, an essential skill in linguistic analysis is to understand for any given framework how it functions and what predictions it makes; and to practice this process, it is useful to choose one framework and explore it in some depth.

- Propose a constraint and give it a precise, explicit definition
- Present valid ranking (weighting) arguments for a set of constraints, given phonological data
- Construct relevant losing candidates to facilitate the identification of ranking arguments
- Produce a factorial typology for a set of constraints and describe the language characteristics that each ranking in the factorial typology (=each *grammar*) will produce
- Recognize the phonetic, typologically based, and/or formal characteristics of a well-motivated constraint, given particular theoretical assumptions

III. Conceptual approaches to formal linguistic analysis

Finally, another goal of this course is to help you develop general skills that are useful for thinking, writing, researching, and teaching in linguistics and beyond.

- Organize your thinking and your discussion clearly and logically
- Work from observable data to state an insightful descriptive generalization
- Form a hypothesis on the basis of a data set or a formal model
- Construct a valid and persuasive argument
- Understand how to work within the framework of a given formal system, and see what its predictions are, even if it's not the system that you prefer to use in your own work
- Identify promising topics for a research project
- Read a linguistics research paper critically and respond to it