

Introducing Linguistics Through Hands-On Research

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Introduction to Linguistics at College-University level

Typically follows a basic format:

Core Areas

- phonetics
- phonology
- morphology
- syntax
- semantics

Introduction to Linguistics at College-University level

Basic format also explores "other" topics

Other Topics

- child language acquisition
- signed languages (usually ASL)
- sociolinguistic variation / dialects
- psycholinguistics
- origins of English

Introduction to Linguistics at College-University level

What are some of the **goals** of **Intro**?

1. introduce students to the discipline
2. train students to approach **human language** as an **object of scientific inquiry**
3. use linguistics to train students in scientific methods
 - hypothesis formation / prediction testing
 - use of empirical data to test theories
4. instill an appreciation of the **universality of human cognition** and also of **human diversity**

Goals:

Achievable through another path?

Goals:

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Methods in Linguistic Research at the College of Staten Island (CUNY)

Experimental class in its fourth semester

- the class is based on NSF-funded ***CUNY Audio-Aligned and Parsed Corpus of New York City English (CoNYCE)***
- CoNYCE co-authored with **Cecelia Cutler** (Lehman College), **Bill Haddican** (Queens College), **Michael Newman** (Queens College), **Beatrice Santorini** (U. of Pennsylvania), and **Ariel Diertani** (The Graduate Center)
- **<https://conyce.common.gc.cuny.edu/>**

Methods in Linguistic Research at the College of Staten Island (CUNY)

Experimental class is based on the CoNYCE

- CoNYCE needs naturalistic data from speakers of NYC English
- raw data comes from field interviews which CUNY undergraduates are conducting with NYC speakers
- class at CSI formalizes the process of data collection into a classroom experience

Methods in Linguistic Research at the College of Staten Island (CUNY)

No background in Linguistics necessary, therefore also suitable for High School level

- **hands-on** research starts from scratch
- student experience in class goes well beyond data collection
- guides the beginner step by step through the research process, **inside the classroom**
- **each step of the way, students focus on a singular task**

Hands-on Research

Focused task #1



Preparing for and executing the interview

1. obligatory HSR and RCR training
2. training in the use of the Zoom H4N Pro recorder
3. training in sociolinguistic / oral-history interview techniques
4. students choose own interviewees (within guidelines)
5. students go out into field and record two interviews each
6. students have subjects fill out a demographic information questionnaire

Hands-on Research

Focused task #1: Outcomes

Interviewing outcomes

1. students gain confidence in use of equipment
2. students come to see humans as important objects of scientific inquiry
3. students learn about respect for human subjects
4. students gain the skill of elicitation of speech, for the purposes of scientific research

Also: **students empowered by the fact that they are individuals of value to the scientific community**

Hands-on Research

Focused task #2: Outcomes

Transcribing outcomes

1. transcription follows a strict protocol; students must learn to follow guidelines that have **rigor**
2. time investment is substantial; but students quickly embrace this "boot camp" activity, and embrace **labor-intensive intellectual work** as respectable / desirable
3. transcribing forces transcriber to take a highly **objective approach** to the speech signal (and therefore to language)
4. because the transcription is time-aligned with a spectrographic representation of the speech signal, students develop an understanding of the **acoustic properties of speech sounds**

Hands-on Research

Focused task #3

Data coding: *r*-dropping

1. each student searches through the first 15 minutes of their transcription, identifying every single **[r] that is in a structural position ripe for dropping**
2. for each case identified as "ripe for *r*-drop," student listens to determine whether [r] was dropped or not
3. each token must be catalogued accordingly in an Excel spreadsheet (drop vs. no-drop)

Hands-on Research

Focused task #3: Outcomes

r-drop coding outcomes

1. using own **intuitions** as NYC *r*-droppers, students learn to identify **structural conditions** for *r*-drop; learn about **unconscious knowledge of rules**
2. students learn about **syllable structure** and how to identify **onsets** and **codas**
3. students learn that *r*-dropping is **variable** (no speaker exhibits it categorically); begin to wonder on their own why
4. data is increasingly **objectively analyzed**

Hands-on Research

Focused task #4

**More finely-grained analysis of structure:
do some structural conditions favor *r*-drop over others?**

1. code for different kinds of **syllable codas**:
 - coda cluster (e.g., *fork*) vs. simplex codas (e.g., *for*)
2. code for [+ / – *r*] in **syllable nucleus**
 - *work* vs. *fork*, *park*
3. polysyllabic words: coda [r] in + / – **stressed syllable**
 - *cárpenter*; *Hárvard*
4. mono-syllabic words coded for **functional** vs. **lexical** status
 - *her* vs. *fur*

Hands-on Research

Focused task #4: Outcomes

1. students develop a more finely-grained understanding of:
 - syllable coda structure
 - word stress (vs. sentence level stress)
 - grammatical vs. lexical words
2. students learn that **structure matters**
3. students form **hypotheses** and **test predictions**
4. as each token must be coded in an Excel spreadsheet, data is **objectively analyzed**
5. students see how the **rules** form part of a speaker's **unconscious knowledge**

Hands-on Research

Focused task #5

Writing up a short research report

- each student writes a report on findings according to a strict reporting format:
 - Introduction
 - Environmental Scan
 - Current Study
 - Methodology: data collection and processing
 - Methodology: data analysis
 - Results
 - Discussion and Future Research

Hands-on Research

Overall outcomes

Goals of *Intro* are met:

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Conclusions

1. does not replace *Intro to Linguistics* course
2. however: meets many important goals of an *Intro* course, without requiring any background in Linguistics
3. energizes and empowers students through hands-on work
4. boot-camp experience effective at getting students to:
 - embrace difficult / rigorous work
 - feel they're a part of something exciting
 - **love linguistics**

THANK YOU!

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