

## Mystery Language Project Guidelines

## Phonetics – Freeman

You will complete an individual project on a language that you do not know. The process includes several steps that will introduce you to resources used by phoneticians and help you hone your transcription skills. See your course calendar for dates corresponding to the steps outlined below.

### 1) Preparation

5 pts

- a) **Language Survey** (complete on Canvas)
- b) Download your language sound files: Once the list of language assignments is posted, find your name on the list and download the zip file with all your language files.
  - The language will be one you don't know, and it is named with a code, so you won't know what language it is.
  - Each sound file is one word said by a native speaker, and the file name is the English gloss (translation) for the meaning of that word.
  - Most language collections are organized into folders labeled *consonants*, *vowels*, and *tone* when applicable. Some may have separate folders for diphthongs or other relevant distinctions, but the absence of a grouping does not necessarily imply the absence of a distinction (e.g., you may find diphthongs in your vowels folder). In your consonants folder, you will have enough evidence to identify all the consonant distinctions in your language (all phonemes and possibly some allophones, although you may not have enough evidence to determine whether a sound is an allophone). In your vowels folder, you will have at least one instance of each vowel phoneme, etc.
  - The number of files does not necessarily correspond directly to the number of phonemes in your language; i.e., not every sound file has a unique sound, but it is possible that you will only have one example of a given sound.

### 2) Transcriptions & IPA charts

100 pts

- a) Download IPA-charts.xlsx. (It is recommended to use this file for your transcriptions and charts.)
- b) **Transcribe** your sound files on the Transcriptions tab (or create your own table). (You may begin doing this by hand, but you must turn in a typed version using correct IPA symbols.)
  - It is highly recommended that you use high-quality headphones, preferably circum-aural (enclosing your ears), to listen to your files in a quiet environment while you transcribe. Computer speakers often distort sounds, and earbuds have low quality output.
  - Transcriptions will work best if you install a Unicode IPA font like [Charis SIL](#). If you cannot do this, use a standard serif font like Times. Many non-Unicode fonts will not display correctly from one computer/OS to the next, so it is a good idea to print your work to a PDF if you change computers while working on this assignment, and to print to PDF before turning it in
  - Column headings should include, in order: file/word number, word gloss, your transcription. (You may add others, as appropriate; e.g., if you'd like to add second options or notes to unconfident transcriptions.)
  - You should have sections with headings for each folder (consonants, vowels, tones, etc.).

c) Create phonetic inventory **charts**

- From your transcriptions, build phonetic inventory charts for your language. Every symbol used in your transcriptions should appear in your charts and vice versa.
- It is highly recommended that you begin with IPA-charts.xlsx and delete any symbols that did not appear in your transcriptions. (Otherwise, you have to create your own formatting.)
- You should not have any empty rows/columns. The font style and size should be uniform.
- Add footnotes to indicate how you distinguish pairs, e.g. voiced/voiceless and rounded/unrounded.
- *Vowel sets*: If your language has phonemic vowel distinctions other than quality (length, nasalization, creakiness, breathiness, laryngealization, etc.), decide whether to create separate charts for each set. If all vowel qualities participate in the distinction, you may simply state this in words below the chart. Otherwise, it often works to add appropriate symbols next to the plain vowels in the same chart. For example, inventories with length distinctions often place long vowels next to their short counterparts. If only a subset of vowels is affected, it may be clearer to show them in a separate chart.
- *Diphthongs (and triphthongs, if applicable)*: If your language has a small vowel inventory, you may put diphthongs on the same chart as monophthongs. If this would be crowded, create a separate chart. If you do not have a separate diphthongs folder, attempt to identify any diphthongs on your own.

d) **Turn in** your transcriptions and charts in one document.

- If you used a Mac or non-standard fonts, you may want to print to PDF. Make sure the output is complete and legible.
- The professor/TA *may* comment (time permitting) on the completeness, consistency, style, formatting, etc. of your work. Take note of any suggestions, so you can address the feedback in your final report.

**3) Comparison & Reflection****75 pts**

- Once the mystery language names are revealed, download the published **article** for your language. Read it carefully and take notes or highlight information you'll use in your report.
- Add a column** to your original transcriptions table for any of the article's transcriptions that differed from yours
  - Only fill in cells with transcriptions that differed from yours. Type them in the same font.
- After your original charts, insert the article's charts, either pasted from the article PDF (high-quality, clear image) or re-created
- Write a comparison** of your charts and transcriptions to those in the article and **reflection** on what you learned (~500 words)
  - Where there are discrepancies, try to determine how significant they are. Did you miss a distinction entirely, or were you close? Were there any patterns to the differences?
  - Listen to the words again to see if you can hear the distinctions in the article's transcriptions. Reflect on which sounds were difficult.

- If you worked with a classmate, describe what you did together, if you disagreed on a transcription, etc.

e) **Turn in one document** with everything above

#### 4) Language Introduction

25 pts

- a) Research your language and add a **paragraph introduction** to the beginning of your paper that includes:
- Your language's three-letter ISO 639-3 code from Ethnologue
  - Its genetic classification (language family, genus, and a step or two below or a lower classification that is well known)
  - Genetic cousins (languages most closely related and/or well-known), plus comments about dialects. If your language is an isolate, try to find comments about any hypotheses about its origins, relatives, or previous classifications.
  - The geographic area(s) where it is spoken, plus social details about its speakers, if applicable (e.g., a particular ethnicity or social class).
  - Numbers of native speakers and second-language users, plus the spheres in which it is used, if applicable/possible (e.g., used in trade, government, at home only, etc.). Note if it is endangered and any comments about efforts to revive it.
  - In-line citations in APA formatting for at least 3 reputable sources (not Wikipedia)
    - Good sources: your article, Ethnologue, journal articles used as sources for a Wikipedia entry, search on Google Scholar (see search-tips.doc on Canvas)
    - Good resource for APA formatting: Purdue OWL (see also Citations.doc)
- a) Add a **references list** (bibliography) to the end of your paper that includes all sources you cited in your introduction. Use APA formatting.

#### 5) English Comparison

50 pts

- b) Download one of the provided English descriptions (California or Northern Cities).
- c) Add a **written comparison** to your paper (~300 words). Compare your language's phoneme inventory to that of the English article, and **make predictions** about pronunciation errors that a native speaker of your mystery language might make when speaking English.
- Consider mismatches in phonemes. If an English sound doesn't exist in the mystery language, what sound(s) might they use instead? Will this cause confusion for native English listeners? What if a sound from the mystery language doesn't exist in English?
  - Consider mismatches in allophones. Are some sounds allophones of different phonemes between the two languages? (Example: the alveolar tap is its own phoneme and sometimes an allophone of the trill in Spanish, but it is an allophone of [t] or [d] in English. What misuses of tap might a Spanish speaker use, and how will it confuse English listeners?)
  - Consider other phonetic aspects, such as VOT, nasality, airstream mechanisms, voice quality, laryngeal setting, tone, pitch accent, etc. How will differences in the contrastiveness of these aspects affect non-native pronunciation? What confusions might arise for listeners?

- Consider other phonological aspects, such as phonotactics, syllable structure, stress placement, intonation, etc.

## 6) Conclusion

**15 pts**

- d) Add a **brief concluding paragraph** to wrap up your paper. Comment on interesting points about the language, what you learned, your process, what you enjoyed, challenges, how you might apply the lessons to something in your future career, etc.

## 7) Final report

**30 pts**

- e) Turn in a final draft that includes all parts (with any revisions in response to prior feedback):
- Language Introduction (paragraph with in-line citations of at least 3 reputable sources)
  - Your original transcriptions + column with article transcriptions that differed from yours
  - Your original charts
  - Article charts (high-quality image or recreation)
  - Comparison and reflection (~500 words)
  - English comparison (~300 words)
  - Conclusion (paragraph)
  - Reference list (bibliography in APA formatting)