Phonology Seminar: Optimality Theory
Ling 105.01, 1-2 credits, Winter Session
Tuesdays 4-6:45pm, Pearson 115

Contact Info
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Goals of the Course
• Give an introduction to a new linguistic theory, Optimality Theory (OT)
• Study topics relevant to the development of OT, including a set of issues and problems connected to Lexical Phonology and Athabaskan linguistics
• Bridge the gap between doing a competent homework assignment and writing a good research paper

Themes of the Course
• Optimality: thinking of grammatical outputs as being picked by well-formedness constraints instead of the output of an algorithmic rule has a set of consequences that distinguish OT from other theories of grammar; task is to get a working knowledge of OT and study these consequences
• Lexical Syndrome: many phonological processes have a clustering of properties which have been explained by assuming they are ‘lexical’, i.e., applies in the same domain that word formation processes apply; we will examine these different properties and consider their interpretation in OT
• Athabaskan: to give the course some empirical grounding, many of the problems discussed in the class will involve data from Athabaskan languages

Course Requirements
• Attendance and active participation is expected, especially as this informs your written work
• Homeworks (40%) will be assigned in the beginning of the semester (roughly one a week) to get a working knowledge of OT
• Reviews and Class Presentations (30%), there will be three of these, two of which will be at the end of the semester and directly tied to your research paper
• Research paper (30%), sizable paper to be turned in at the end of the semester (see Activities and Guidelines for the due dates and the work that this involves)

Materials
• Rutgers Optimality Archive <http://ruccs.rutgers.edu/roa.html> (check it out!)
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 23</td>
<td>introduction, course logistics, introductory problem, prospectus and statement of goals of the class</td>
<td>1 of Kager</td>
<td>Mar. 20</td>
<td>lexical syndrome, the phenomena and some proposals, history of the problem, interpretations in OT</td>
<td>4 of Spencer</td>
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<td>Jan. 30</td>
<td>review of the model, theory of constraints, basics of constraint interaction, example problems</td>
<td>1 of McCarthy</td>
<td>Mar. 27</td>
<td>alignment effects, cyclicity as alignment, morphology-phonology interface</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>Feb. 6</td>
<td>Homework 1 due (review), factorial typology, syllable theory</td>
<td>3.1.1, 3.1.3 of McCarthy, 1.7 (again) and 3 of Kager</td>
<td>Apr. 3</td>
<td>output-to-output correspondence, illustrating the problem, stratal OT, discussion of alternatives</td>
<td>6 of Kager</td>
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<td>Feb. 13</td>
<td>Homework 2 due (review), duplication problem, richness of the base</td>
<td>3.1.2 of McCarthy</td>
<td>Apr. 10</td>
<td>positional faithfulness, case study on Navajo</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>Feb. 20</td>
<td>Homework 3 due (review), visit from Keren Rice, stem-initial voicing problem, laryngeal phonology in Athabaskan in general</td>
<td>Rice 1994</td>
<td>Apr. 17</td>
<td>class presentations, ‘elsewhere’ phenomena</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>Feb. 27</td>
<td>Homework 4 due (review), further consequences: non-uniformity, emergence of the unmarked, conspiracies</td>
<td>3.1.4 of McCarthy</td>
<td>Apr. 24</td>
<td>class presentations, strict cycle condition effects, morpho-phonological operations</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>Mar. 6</td>
<td>issues in learnability</td>
<td>4.2 of McCarthy, 7 of Kager</td>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>class presentations, theories of exceptions</td>
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<td>Mar. 13</td>
<td>Spring Break! (no class)</td>
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<td>May 8</td>
<td>final paper due (no class)</td>
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Guidelines for Writing a Review

Purpose:
• To develop our understanding of the problems and issues of the class; each student will present three in-class presentations based on their reviews
• To feed into activities for the research paper; students will be instructed to review articles that are related to their research paper

Format:
The review should be long enough to satisfactorily complete the work outlined below, but no longer than 3 pages (single space). It should also be type-written, and all of the work should be organized into the sections given below.

Part 1: Overview, statement of topic and outline of issues
What is the article about? What are the principal empirical and theoretical issues discussed in the piece, and what conclusions are reached? Give a crisp summary of the article, perhaps a half a page, making sure that you include an explicit statement of the conclusions.

Part 2: Summary of arguments
In this section, summarize the principal arguments of the article, showing step-by-step how the researchers reached the conclusions stated in part 1. Be sure to mention the basic evidence used to support each argument, and give one or two illustrations which depict the crucial elements of the analysis. Don’t give a chronological summary of the paper: this almost always obscures the basic points and the logical flow of the arguments. A comprehensive summary can typically be done in a page, but be sure to cover all of the main points.

Part 3: Discussion of conclusions
In this section, also roughly a page long, discuss any open issues or problems raised by the article, perhaps even directly stated in the article. How do the main conclusions relate to the discussions in class on the topic? Are there empirical problems with the analysis, or the implications stemming from the assumptions inherent to the analysis? How does the analysis compare with other plausible alternative analyses? Engage your reader by developing the ideas discussed in the paper in these ways.
Activities and Guidelines for Writing the Research Paper

During the last 6-7 weeks of the course you should budget some time to think about and engage in the research activities involved in writing the research paper.

**Logistics:** You should complete the tasks listed below by the following dates. Of course, early completion and consultation is always welcome.

**Mar. 6, Prospectus (2%):** this is a brief outline of the research you plan to do (no more than one page).

The prospectus should describe the phenomenon you are studying, cite the main source(s) you are consulting, and suggest why it’s an interesting problem to work on and/or where your investigations might lead. The prospectus should be handed in with a copy of the principal data source or article that discusses the phenomenon under investigation.

**Mar. 27, Organized data sheet (2%):** this is a one page presentation of the data which will be analyzed in your paper. The data sheet should be organized in a way that clarifies the descriptive generalizations and must include a statement of what each group of data shows.

**Apr. 10, Sketch of analysis (2%):** this is a two page sketch of the analysis, as you see it developing.

Begin by outlining your theoretical assumptions and then illustrate how they apply to the phenomenon under examination. The sketch should be turned in with a copy of the data sheet, updated to include any additional data you feel is relevant.

**Apr. 24, Discussion of implications (2%):** this is a one to two page discussion of the implications of the proposed analysis. What are the implications of your analysis for the same phenomenon in other languages, or related phonological phenomena? Hand this in with the sketch and data sheet.

**May 8, Final draft of research paper (92%):** the final paper is due on this day. It should integrate all of the work done up to this date in an organized paper. The paper should be roughly between 8 or 12 pages single space, with ample margins. As much as possible, the paper should look like a linguistics article. For example, it should have a reference section and the references should appear in text as “(So-and-so, 1994)“, rather than in footnotes. Also, it should have a short introduction that sets out the problem and why it’s interesting, a section presenting the proposal and a discussion of its implications, and a conclusion that summarizes all of these points. An important factor in the grade is how the work has progressed over the course of the project, responding where appropriate to the questions raised by the instructor and in class discussion.

**Substance:**

The paper should deal with some relatively modest phonological problem, appropriate to the length and scope of the project. The area of phonology addressed — stress, syllables, segments — doesn’t really matter, as long as you feel comfortable with it. You should make use, as much as possible, of the analytical and descriptive techniques and theoretical ideas introduced in class.

The ideal type of paper, then, would be an OT account of some phonological problem. If you already have a problem in mind, that’s great. If you don’t, then I suggest spending a little time thumbing through old linguistics journals in the library. Just about every issue will offer rich material for (re)analysis. If you have any questions or concerns about this, don’t wait until the prospectus is due. Talk to me sooner than that.