

GE2128: THE SOUNDS OF THE WORLD' S LANGUAGES

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

The Sounds of the World' s Languages

Subject Code

GE - Gateway Education

Course Number

2128

Academic Unit

Linguistics and Translation (LT)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

GE Area (Primary)

Area 1 - Arts and Humanities

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course brings awareness to students the richness of human speech sounds through (i) demonstrations of a wide variety of the sounds of the world's languages and (ii) descriptions of the multifaceted - articulatory, physiological, acoustical, and linguistic - characteristics of speech sounds. Students will be taught to use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), an international standard system of notation for transcribing the sounds of the languages of the world. The knowledge of the IPA facilitates the learning of the sounds of foreign languages. Students will participate in the learning activities, such as (i) oral and listening practice of the sounds of different languages, (ii) transcribing sounds using the IPA symbols, (iii) carrying out simple acoustic analysis of speech sounds, and (iv) viewing the video clips of articulation mechanisms and examining the models of the structures of the vocal tract and larynx for speech production. Students will find the course useful not only for gaining knowledge of the sounds of the languages of the world, but also for building a career in teaching pronunciation of the sounds of foreign languages, speech therapy, and speech engineering.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Describe the sounds and sound systems of different languages of the world and their similarities and differences.		x	x	x
2	Discover the typology and universals of the sounds and sound systems of different languages.		x	x	
3	Explain the phonetic properties of the sounds of the world's languages based on the information from multi-disciplines, such as human biology, speech physiology, speech acoustics, and linguistics.		x	x	x
4	Apply the IPA symbols to transcription and pronunciation of the sounds of different languages.			x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Weekly lectures	Students will engage with (i) Presentation of the nature of the sounds and sound systems of the world's languages and the IPA symbols; (ii) video clips of (a) the structure of the vocal tract and larynx and (b) the vocal organs involved in speech production; (iii) audio demonstration of the various types of sounds of languages.	1, 2, 3, 4	3 hours
2	In-class practice and discussion	Students will participate in: (i) discussions of questions and points raised by the teacher and students; (ii) oral and listening practices of the sounds of different languages with self and group assessments; (iii) practices of transcribing speech sounds using the IPA symbols; (iv) carrying out simple acoustical analysis of speech sounds.	1, 2, 3, 4	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- " for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?	
1	Four bi-weekly written assignments: (i) Comparison of the phonetic characteristics of the sounds of different languages; (ii) transcription of speech sounds using the IPA symbols. (15% x 4)	1, 2, 3, 4	60	Students can use GenAI tools to brainstorm, gather information, solve problems, format references, and edit language. Students should give proper acknowledgment to all the contents from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the assignments and keep a journal of their GenAI conversations. Students should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

60

Examination (%)

40

Examination Duration (Hours)

2

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

Written assignments

Criterion

(a) Capacity for self-directed learning to compare the phonetic characteristics of the sounds of the world's languages.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Perform excellently in all the comparison tasks.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Perform very well in most of the comparison tasks.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Perform well in some comparison tasks.

Marginal (D)

Perform passably in the comparison tasks.

Failure (F)

Perform poorly in the comparison tasks.

Assessment Task

Written assignments

Criterion

(b) Knowledge of the IPA symbols and mastery of skill in IPA transcription.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Show full knowledge of the IPA symbols and excellent skill in IPA transcription.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Show good knowledge of the IPA symbols and good skill in IPA transcription.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Show some knowledge of the IPA symbols and average skill in IPA transcription.

Marginal (D)

Show minimal knowledge of the IPA symbols and limited skill in IPA transcription.

Failure (F)

Show no knowledge of the IPA symbols and poor skill in IPA transcription.

Assessment Task

Final examination

Criterion

(a) Ability to describe and explain the phonetic characteristics of various types of speech sounds of the world's languages.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Perform excellently in all the descriptions and explanations.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Perform very well in most of the descriptions and explanations.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Perform well in some of the descriptions and explanations.

Marginal (D)

Perform passably in most of the descriptions and explanations.

Failure (F)

Perform poorly in all the descriptions and explanations.

Assessment Task

Final examination

Criterion

(b) Knowledge of the subject matter and course content.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Show excellent knowledge of the subject matter and course content.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Show good knowledge of the subject matter and course content.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Show some knowledge of the subject matter and course content.

Marginal (D)

Show limited knowledge of the subject matter and course content.

Failure (F)

Show no knowledge of the subject matter and course content.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

World's languages, speech sounds, consonant, vowel, tone, stress, sound system, speech articulation, speech phonation, speech physiology, speech acoustics, IPA symbols.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Zsiga, Elizabeth (2013). The Sounds of Language. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
2	Rogers, Henry (2000). The Sounds of Language. New York: Routledge.
3	Ashby, Patricia (2011), Understanding Phonetics. London: Hodder Education.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Ladefoged, Peter and Ian Maddieson (1996). The Sounds of the World's Languages. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
2	Ladefoged and Sandra Ferrari Disner (2012). Vowels and Consonants (3rd ed.) Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell
3	Ladefoged, Peter and Keith Johnson (2015). A Course in Phonetics (7th ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.
4	IPA (1999). Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A Guide to the Use of the International Phonetic Alphabets. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5	Maddieson, Ian (1984). Patterns of Sounds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6	Catford, John C. (2001). A Practical Introduction to Phonetics (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7	Pullum, Geoffrey. K. and William A. Ladusaw (1996). Phonetic Symbol Guide (2nd ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
8	Denes, Peter B. and Elliot N. Pinson (1993). The Speech Chain: The Physics and Biology of Spoken Language. New York: W.H. Freeman.
9	Pereltsvaig, Asya (2012). Languages of the World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10	UCLA Phonetics Lab' data on the sounds of the world's languages http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu/index/sounds.html
11	The World Atlas of Language Structures http://wals.info/language

12	Website of the International Phonetic Association http://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org
13	Journal of the International Phonetic Association http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=IPA

Annex (for GE courses only)

A. Please specify the Gateway Education Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) that the course is aligned to and relate them to the CILOs stated in Part II, Section 2 of this form:

Please indicate which CILO(s) is/are related to this PILO, if any (can be more than one CILOs in each PILO)

PILO 1: Demonstrate the capacity for self-directed learning

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 2: Explain the basic methodologies and techniques of inquiry of the arts and humanities, social sciences, business, and science and technology

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 3: Demonstrate critical thinking skills

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 6: Demonstrate effective oral communication skills

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 8: Recognise important characteristics of their own culture(s) and at least one other culture, and their impact on global issues

1, 2, 3, 4

PILO 10: Demonstrate the attitude and/or ability to accomplish discovery and/or innovation

1, 2, 3, 4

B. Please select an assessment task for collecting evidence of student achievement for quality assurance purposes. Please retain at least one sample of student achievement across a period of three years.

Selected Assessment Task

Final exam