

Phonetics/Phonology problem set

24.900 — Introduction to linguistics

April 4, 2005

1 Natural classes

For each of the following sets of segments, indicate the one that doesn't belong with the rest, and state what's the phonetic description of the class of segments that are left, i.e.:

[d], [v], [b], [p], [k] — [v] is the odd one out; the segments that are left are all stops.

- [p], [m], [d], [k], [t]
- [s], [l], [p], [t], [n], [d]
- [b], [m], [n], [ŋ]
- [k], [tʃ], [f], [n], [æ], [ʒ]
- [f], [ð], [p], [z], [ʃ], [v], [θ]
- [d], [t], [s], [z], [k], [l], [n]
- [f], [θ], [ʃ], [s], [t]
- [i], [e], [ɛ], [u], [æ]
- [u], [i], [v], [e], [o]
- [ɔ], [i], [v], [u], [ɪ]

2 Minimal pairs

Illustrate the following contrasts in English by providing one minimal pair, in phonetic transcription.

- [t]:[d]
- [k]:[p]
- [l]:[r]
- [ɛ]:[æ]
- [u]:[v]
- [h]:[s]
- [b]:[m]
- [ɑ]:[æ]

- [m]:[ŋ]
- [ɪ]:[e]

Extra credit: two of the contrasts above do not hold in all positions (for the present purposes, consider only the “word-initial” and “word-final” positions as relevant). Which two are they?

3 Essay

Essay: Minimum of 500 words

Topic: What do linguistics study and why

Audience: Someone who is educated but who thinks that linguists simply know lots of languages.

Based on what you understand at this point in the semester about the study of linguistics, write a focused and organized essay informing the educated person noted above about the study of linguistics. What is it that linguists are attempting to discover through their study of languages? What importance does such study have in terms of theories of the brain and mind? Is there anything unique in terms of human cognition about language? Make reference to examples we have examined in class, bring in examples from your informant’s language as well if you can. Incorporate other examples and evidence that we may not have looked at but with which you are familiar, if you want.

Make sure you have some thesis that you are using the text of your essay to support.