

How to do Phonology

A mini-course with Jonathan Kaye

A joint event by UCL and SOAS Linguistics
Four days between 3–12 May 2016

How to do Phonology

To do phonology you need:

1. A theory that is ridiculously easy to disprove. This is your beacon; it shows you where to look.
2. A large dose of scepticism. The amount of inaccuracies contained in phonological descriptions is breathtaking. Always, always, always check your facts. Assume that everything you read is false until proven otherwise.

This mini-course will provide a number of case-studies in which a theory with strong empirical content (easily falsifiable) leads to the exposure of widely believed, but entirely false claims. We shall start with the study of the claim by Bromberger & Halle that phonology and syntax are fundamentally different with respect to the formal nature of their structures. Close inspection of the “evidence” they provide to support their conclusion shows that there is every reason to believe that their conclusion, phonology is fundamentally different from syntax, is incorrect.

A dissection of their arguments leads us to issues such as the existence of the mysterious “Dialect B” of Canadian English. In fact, a more comprehensive study of the facts of Dialect A (the dialect that did and does exist) shows that the entire phenomenon has nothing to do with phonology at all.

The destruction of sacred cows continues with claims about the entirely fictional “voicing assimilation” of English, “velar palatalization” of Italian (or indeed other language), umlaut or metaphony, and a host of other allegedly phonological events.

The moral of this mini-seminar is to demonstrate that a theory with little or no empirical content is incapable of separating the wheat from the chaff (i.e. the phonology from the noise).

Programme and Venues

Tue 3 May	11:30am–1pm 1pm–2pm 2pm–3:30pm	Session 1 Lunch Session 2	Venue: UCL Chandler House G15 2 Wakefield Street London WC1N 1PF
Fri 6 May	11:30am–1pm 1pm–2pm 2pm–3:30pm	Session 3 Lunch Session 4	Venue: UCL Chandler House G15 2 Wakefield Street London WC1N 1PF
Mon 9 May	11:30am–1pm 1pm–2pm 2pm–3:30pm	Session 5 Lunch Session 6	Venue: SOAS Main Building, G51 Russell Square London WC1H 0XG
Fri 13 May	11:30am–1pm 1pm–2pm 2pm–3:30pm	Session 7 Lunch Session 8	Venue: SOAS Brunei Gallery, B104 Russell Square London WC1H 0XG

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