Linguistics 327: Research on Braille

Rice University
Fall 2023

Syllabus

Class Meetings: MWF 3:00-3:50, Herring 125

Course Canvas Site: (TBD)

Instructor: Dr. Robert Englebreton  ("Dr. E")  he/him/his
Physical Office: Herring 206
Office Hours: TBA and By Appointment on Zoom
E-mail: reng@rice.edu (I aim to answer emails within 24 hours, usually sooner.)
Office Phone: 713 348-4776 (Leave a voicemail and I will return your call ASAP.)

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

This course introduces students to the perceptual, cognitive, linguistic, and social underpinnings of braille. It provides a brief introduction to the field of Disability Studies and the history and social construction of disability, with a focus on blindness and visual impairment. It explores the place of braille literacy in the reading sciences, and the role of the reading sciences in braille pedagogy and development. The course is conducted as a seminar, focusing on discussion and analysis of source readings, videos, and hands-on experience with braille.

Upon completion of this course, students will:

✓ Have a basic understanding and appreciation of braille and a grounding in the braille-research literature.
✓ Have a basic awareness of the disability rights movement in the United States, the social construction of blindness, and the role of braille in the lives of those who use it.
✓ Have learned to critically analyze published research articles, to compare and evaluate studies that propose contradictory results, and to consider how the positionalities of researchers may lead to biases in the questions they think to ask and the methods they use to answer them.
✓ Have had the opportunity to propose a braille-related research question and to design a study to address it.

This is not a course to teach braille for professional use or competence. If you wish to pursue learning braille professionally, please talk with me, and I can point you to appropriate resources elsewhere.

This course has previously been offered under LING 409, the department’s “Special Topics in Linguistics” series. If you already have taken it in that format, you cannot retake it as LING 327.
Required Texts And Materials

A collection of published articles and videos, as listed in the bibliography of this syllabus. You can access these from the 'Readings and Videos' page on our Canvas site, which will link to the online journal holdings in Fondren Library, and to other sites as relevant.

I will give each of you a braille slate and stylus at no cost, which you can keep after the course ends. You can use this for the homework assignments that require a basic demonstration of braille writing. Please also download the PerkyDuck braille emulation software (Windows/Mac) from https://www.duxburysystems.com/perky.asp You can use this to produce braille files for the relevant homework if you’d prefer to not use the slate.

Course Requirements and Grading

- Attendance and active participation in class 10%
- Discussion points (course blog) before each class 35%
- Five short homework assignments 20%
- Research Proposal 35%

Course letter grades will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0-59.99%</th>
<th>60-69.99%</th>
<th>70-79.99%</th>
<th>80-89.99%</th>
<th>90-100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Designations of plus and minus will be given to grades ranging within 1 percentage point of the cutoff. For example: 99.0-100% is an A+, 90.0-90.99% is an A-, 89.0-89.99% is a B+, and so on. Students who earn less than 60% will fail the course.

This course has no midterm and no final exam. There are however a lot of readings, which you are expected to carefully read and actively discuss on the course blog and in class.

ATTENDANCE (ABSENCE POLICIES): Because this is a seminar-style class, your involvement and attention is crucial! Students are expected to attend class. If you know you will have to miss a class ahead of time, please let me know. More than three non-illness-related absences will lower your participation grade by 1 percentage point per occurrence.

DISCUSSION POINTS: For each day with assigned readings (indicated by an asterisk on the course schedule), you are required to submit three discussion points: questions, quibbles, observations, or suggestions for follow-up research. (Note this means three discussion points per class day, not three for each article.) Submit your discussion points as a blog entry on the course discussion thread on Canvas by noon on the day we will be discussing the reading. You are encouraged to read and comment on each other's blog entries if you wish to do so. Discussion points are worth 35% of your course grade. You have three freebees! But failure to submit discussion points for more than three of the required days this semester will lead to a deduction of 2 percentage points from your course grade for each day skipped. Blog entries are due by noon on the day of discussion.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS: There will be five short homework assignments due throughout the semester, as shown on the course schedule. These are designed to give you practice in reading and writing the basics of English Braille (no more than a few braille lines each), or give you the opportunity to write a short opinion piece related to issues discussed in class (no more than 1-2 single-spaced printed pages).
**RESEARCH PROPOSAL:** Each student is expected to submit a short paper (5-10 print pages), in the form of a preliminary research proposal. You will not need to carry out the study, but your paper must do the following: (1) Identify a research question, review prior literature, and explain why your question is an interesting/worthwhile topic to pursue; (2) propose precisely how you would conduct the study (subjects, materials, methods, etc.); (3) explain why the results of your question would be of significance to linguistics and cognitive science, and, conversely, why the results of your study would matter to the teaching, reading, or development of braille. You will present a quick summary of your proposal in class during the last week of the semester. The final written version of the paper is due on Canvas by 11:59pm on Dec. 12, the last day of the final exam period.

**Rice Honor Code**

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at [http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/](http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/). This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

**Disability Support Services**

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

**Title IX Responsible Employee Notification**

Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of harassment, pregnancy discrimination or gender discrimination, or relationship, sexual, or other forms of interpersonal violence to seek support from The SAFE Office.

At Rice University, unlawful discrimination in any form, including sexual misconduct, is prohibited under Rice Policy on Harassment and Sexual Harassment (Policy 830) and the Student Code of Conduct. As the instructor and a responsible employee, I am required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to the Title IX Coordinator on campus. Although responsible employees are required to make this notification, it is the student's choice to pursue a formal complaint. The goal is to make sure that students are aware of the range of options available and have access to the resources when in need. For more information, please visit safe.rice.edu, titleix.rice.edu, or email titleixsupport@rice.edu.
Course Outline

* Each item marked with an asterisk requires blog posts, due by noon on the Canvas Discussion thread. (Three freebees.)
Readings preceded by Ref. are included only for reference purposes. Please don’t read them (unless you enjoy reading things like reference books and dictionaries...) . You should be aware of what they are and how to find them if you wish to look something up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/21</td>
<td>Introduction and overview of braille</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/23</td>
<td>How is braille read and written?</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/25</td>
<td>‘Writing system’ vs ‘code’</td>
<td>Englebretson et al. 2023a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/28</td>
<td>Braille in the wider culture and environment</td>
<td>*Kleege 2006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/30</td>
<td>Disability studies; ableism</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/1</td>
<td>Disability rights in the US</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>HW #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/4</td>
<td>No Class (Labor Day)</td>
<td>*“Crip Camp”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/6</td>
<td>Discussion: History and social construction of disability</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>History and social construction of blindness</td>
<td>*Ferguson 2001 ch 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>Origins of braille</td>
<td>Lorimer 2000; Campsic 2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/13</td>
<td>Overview of Unified English Braille (UEB)</td>
<td>Ref. ICEB 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>Demographics of braille literacy</td>
<td>*Sheffield et al. 2022</td>
<td>HW #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/18</td>
<td>Blindness, touch, &amp; braille</td>
<td>*Heller &amp; Gentaz 2014 ch 7 &amp; 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/20</td>
<td>Visual vocabulary, verbalism, language development</td>
<td>*Bedny et al. 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>Blindness, touch, and braille #2</td>
<td>*Millar 1997 ch 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>Neuroplasticity</td>
<td>*Bedny &amp; MacSweeney 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>The science of (print) reading</td>
<td>*Castles et al. 2018</td>
<td>HW #3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Week 7

**10/2** Comparing print and braille reading #1  
*Perea et al. 2012  
*Veispak et al. 2012

**10/4** Comparing print and braille reading #2  
*Veispak et al. 2013;  
*Wetzel & Knowlton 2000

**10/6** Teaching braille literacy (no in-class meeting) Watch Wormsley Keynote video before Weds.

## Week 8

**10/9** No Class (Midterm Recess)

**10/11** Braille literacy and blind children (Discuss Wormsley video)  
*Wormsley Keynote Video

**10/13** Braille literacy in adulthood after vision loss  
None

## Week 9

**10/16** Hands and fingers  
*Wright et al. 2009;  
*Hughes et al. 2014

**10/18** Finger tracking  
None

**10/20** Contractions #1  
*Hamp & Caton 1984;  
*Savaiano and Kearns 2016  
HW #4

## Week 10

**10/23** Contractions #2  
*Millar 1997 Ch 6

**10/25** Error analysis  
*Wells-Jensen et al. 2007

**10/27** The ABC Braille Study  
*Wall Emerson et al. 2009

## Week 11

**10/30** Sublexical structure in braille reading  
* Fischer-Baum and Englebretson 2016

**11/1** Overview of Fischer-Baum, Englebretson, & Holbrook research project  
None

**11/3** Sublexical structure in braille writing  
* Englebretson et al. 2023b

## Week 12

**11/6** Correlates of braille literacy  
*Ryles 1996

**11/8** Braille and the IPA  
Englebretson 2009

**11/10** Braille in STEM  
None

## Week 13

**11/13** Tactile graphics  
None

**11/15** Braille music notation; braille around the world  
Refs. (Music Braille Code 2015; World Braille Usage 2013)
11/17 Web accessibility

WEEK 14
11/20 Summary / wrap-up / future directions
11/22 No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)
11/24 No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)

WEEK 15
11/27 Student presentations #1   n/a
11/29 Student presentations #2   n/a
12/1 Student Presentations #3    n/a

FINAL WEEK
12/12 Research Proposal Due by 11:59pm

**Readings and Videos, Listed in the order they are assigned.**


