Linguistics 327: Research on Braille

Rice University
Fall 2023

Syllabus

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

Course Canvas Site: https://canvas.rice.edu/courses/58683

Instructor: Dr. Robert Englebretson ("Dr. E") he/him/his
Physical Office: Herring 206
Office Hours: Weds. 1:00-2:30pm, and By Appointment
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 'Resource List’ link on our Canvas site.
Course Requirements and Grading

- Attendance and active participation in class: 10%
- Discussion points (course blog) before each class: 35%
- Five short homework assignments: 25%
- Research Proposal: 30%

Course letter grades will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-59.99%</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-69.99%</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-79.99%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-89.99%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
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</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, or give you the opportunity to write a short opinion piece related to issues discussed in class.

**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/. 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.

Mental Health Statement

The wellbeing and mental health of students is important; if you are having trouble completing your coursework, please reach out to the Wellbeing and Counseling Center.

Rice University provides cost-free mental health services through the Wellbeing and Counseling Center to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your personal or academic well-being. If you believe you are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, the Student Wellbeing Office or the Rice Counseling Center may be able to assist you. The Wellbeing and Counseling Center is located in the Gibbs Wellness Center and can be reached at 713-348-3311 (available 24/7).

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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8/21</td>
<td>Introduction and overview of braille</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/23</td>
<td>How is braille read and written?</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/25</td>
<td>‘Writing system’ vs ‘code’</td>
<td>*Englebreton, Holbrook, and Fischer-Baum 2023</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 2</strong></td>
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<td>8/28</td>
<td>Braille in the wider culture and environment</td>
<td>*Kleege 2006</td>
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<td>8/30</td>
<td>Disability studies; ableism</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>9/1</td>
<td>Disability rights in the US</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>HW #1</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 3</strong></td>
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<td>9/4</td>
<td>No Class (Labor Day)</td>
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<td>9/6</td>
<td>Discussion: History and social construction of disability</td>
<td>**“Crip Camp” Documentary</td>
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<td>9/8</td>
<td>History and social construction of blindness</td>
<td>*Ferguson 2001 ch 2</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 4</strong></td>
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<td>9/11</td>
<td>Language development, ‘verbalism’</td>
<td>*Bedny et al. 2019</td>
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<td>9/13</td>
<td>Origins of braille</td>
<td>Lorimer 2000; Campsie 2021</td>
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<td>9/15</td>
<td>Overview of Unified English Braille (UEB)</td>
<td>Ref. ICEB 2013</td>
<td>HW #2</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 5</strong></td>
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<td>9/18</td>
<td>Demographics of braille literacy</td>
<td>*Sheffield et al. 2022</td>
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<td>9/20</td>
<td>Teaching braille literacy (no in-class meeting)</td>
<td>*Wormsley Keynote Video</td>
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<td>Watch Wormsley Keynote video before Fri.</td>
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<td>9/22</td>
<td>Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 6</strong></td>
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<td>9/25</td>
<td>Braille literacy in adulthood after vision loss</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>9/27</td>
<td>Blindness, touch, &amp; braille #1</td>
<td>*Heller &amp; Gentaz 2014 ch 7 &amp; 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>Blindness, touch, and braille #2</td>
<td>*Millar 1997 ch 2</td>
<td>HW #3</td>
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Week 7
10/2  Blindness, touch, & braille #3  *Bola et al. 2016;
      *Oshima et al. 2014.  
10/4  Neuroplasticity  *Bedny & MacSweeney 2019  
10/6  The science of (print) reading  *Castles et al. 2018

Week 8
10/9  No Class (Midterm Recess)  
10/11 Comparing print and braille reading #1  *Perea et al. 2012  
10/13 Comparing print and braille reading #2  *Veispak et al. 2012  
      *Veispak et al. 2013;  
      *Wetzel & Knowlton 2000

Week 9
10/16 Hands and fingers  *Wright et al. 2009;  
10/18 Finger tracking  *Hughes et al. 2014  
10/20 Contractions #1  None  
      *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. 2023

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 None

WEEK 14
11/20 Summary / wrap-up / future directions None
11/22 No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)
11/24 No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)

WEEK 15
11/27 Student presentations #1 n/a HW #5
11/29 Student presentations #2 n/a
12/1 Student Presentations #3 n/a

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

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


