

Meghavarshini Krishnaswamy

Teaching Statement

I consider teaching linguistics to be a combination of instruction on theoretical aspects, data analysis, experimental and research methods, and application in day to day human existence. I also focus on why linguistics is a valuable part of education across domains, and how students can use the knowledge they gain in the classroom to understand language use in day-to-day life, challenge assumptions and biases, and spread the joy of dialects and language diversity. In my daily teaching practice, my focus is on translating this broad aim into specific daily achievable and measurable goals, with a focus on creating teaching materials that can be easily transferred to future language researchers and educators.

My teaching experience includes undergraduate linguistics (at the University of Arizona), phonetics lab training at the masters level (The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad), elementary- and middle-school science and English (in India), and Natural Language Processing (NLP) workshop leading at the Data Science Institute (University of Arizona). During my time as a TA for the Department of Linguistics, University of Arizona, I have been the instructor of record (sole instructor) for Introduction to Phonetics (Spring 2023) and for Psychology of Language, an introductory psycholinguistics course (Summer 2022 and 2023, special focus on sound and morphological acquisition). During my time as a Research Associate at the English and Foreign Languages University (Hyderabad) I had leadership of the phonetics lab for the “Digital Signal Processing and Acoustic Phonetics” course, including leading all lab sessions and grading lab work. During my two years on the Teach for India program, I trained as and taught full-time at a low-income private elementary/middle school. This gave me the ability to explain science and language topics to a wide variety of audiences, and work on community-building with a variety of stakeholders in the Indian education system. The fellowship also provided me with rigorous teacher-training on classroom management, curriculum development, subject-matter expertise and syllabus design. Although this was not university-level work, my experience is essential for all practical aspects of student engagement and pedagogical professionalism, as well as curriculum research for General Education courses.

In Fall 2024 as part of my GRA role in the UA Data Science Institute, I have designed and lead an 8-week non-credit workshop series called [NLP for All](#), which introduces Natural Language Processing topics to researchers across all disciplines. I will be leading it again in Spring 2025. This gave me opportunities to discuss good use cases for large language models, as well as efficient low-resource alternatives, which is a very current topic in many fields. Both in this workshop and in my course teaching, I incorporate my own computational research interests to demonstrate to researchers that a variety of career paths in linguistics are open to them, including industry applications.

One example from my teaching experience of how I teach analytical thinking through practice is with phonetics lab lab work, where I teach students to collect, transcribe, and document linguistic data; how to store the data with relevant metadata; and how to anonymize data appropriately, so that they can scale their methods to larger projects in the future. I conduct language background surveys at the start of the course and incorporate student responses into teaching examples and assessment questions. I design transcription and other lab tasks around their language background, and ask them to examine their own speech

patterns as a means to understand how linguistics connects us to identity. For example, I found in one course that many of my students were bilingual and had high school courses in many languages. We examined how their specific language knowledge affected their pronunciation. When there are Spanish-bilingual speakers in class, I can focus on acoustics of trills and dental stops, while when there are Mandarin speakers in the class, I make sure to include lab work on tone. In my phonetics lab in India, I taught tone with Punjabi voiced stops as my example. Comparing students' data across the class allows students to examine male and female voices as a bimodal distribution, and look at impacts of gender presentation and identity on voice quality.

As a speaker of Indian English, I find it useful to teach about Englishes of the world and discuss accent bias and perceived prestige. Through lab classes on their own idiolects, I invite my students to consider everyone as having an accent. I use phonetics courses as a means to understand and celebrate linguistic variation. In class, I have students do close transcription of their own speech and the speech of their classmates, as well as recordings of languages they are not familiar with, to practise hearing and identifying subtle phonetic differences. I have also assigned students to distinguish among various United Kingdom dialects with specific examples. My experience as an Indian English speaker gives me the ability to draw students' attention to linguistic biases against varieties and its correlation with social status. It also provides me with a clear example of how language is a form of cultural assertion and pride, and how language varieties change with political and historical progress (e.g. MK Gandhi's speech changing from RP earlier in life to a strong Indian English variety as he emerged as a leader of the Indian freedom movement). I use this as a springboard from which to encourage students to value their own language variety, whether that is Valley Girl English, Chicano English, or an L2 English. This ties in with my goal of teaching students to see the relevance of linguistics to daily life.

I am fortunate to have gained teaching experience in a public institution with a student population that includes students from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. This, along with my experience with K-12 teaching in the low-income classrooms in India, has taught me to make my classroom environment inclusive for all. The University of Arizona is a Hispanic Serving Institution and an American Indian and Alaska Native-Serving Institution, and it has a high proportion of first-generation students and Pell Grant recipients. It is also known for having an excellent Disability Resource Center, which attracts students with a variety of needs. Teaching at this institution has helped me learn to teach to a wide variety of university students, including making phonetics inclusive to students with hearing disabilities. My focus on the importance and value of linguistic diversity ties in well with the diversity among our students. In specific cases, I have been able to help students who felt stigmatized based on their variety of English to value dialect variety. I also make my class flexible for students who have to work many hours to support themselves or family by allowing many ways to make up missed classes. I build this into course design so that it is universally available, and students do not have to disclose their economic or family situation to access this flexibility. After a DRC request, I also build accessibility for students with neurodivergent needs, such as alternatives to group/team tasks and class presentations, optionally oral in-class assessments. I hope to continue learning about universal design features to improve classroom experience and learning.