



# Variation and change in Language



Composante(s)  
UFR Langues et  
Civilisations



Période de  
l'année  
Semestre 1

## En bref

- > **Mobilité d'études:** Oui
- > **Accessible à distance:** Non

## Présentation

### Description

This seminar is intended to be an introduction to the existence of phonetic variation and change in present and recent days English, and to give students some tools to detect and analyse this variation. Far from being a theoretical course on the major changes that took place in the history of English, this class will focus on language as can be directly accessed by us using recent and contemporary sources and tools. It will be made of three main parts:

- \* 1/ How pronunciation was indicated in older dictionaries as objects of knowledge and culture, starting from 16th and 17th century books, and mainly focusing on 18th to 20th century dictionaries. We will try to decipher their various transcriptional methods in times when phonetic alphabets did not exist yet, including their lacks and inconsistencies. We will also study the way dictionaries gradually turned from prescriptivist objects meant to dictate an idealized view of the language, into present-day descriptivist objects that try to show the language as it actually is.
- \* 2/ How a collection of dictionaries from various periods can be used as a relevant corpus used to identify and explain phonetic variation and change in present-day English as well as from a historical perspective, including the way new linguistic features can be born and spread through the language. We will tackle the methodological and epistemological aspects of what a corpus is and how to consider it reliable on account of what is or is not to be found in it. We will also learn how to use the electronic versions of the latest pronunciation dictionaries so as to use them as a way to detect ongoing change in recent and contemporary English. Additionally, we will discover a few other electronic corpora and tools (OED, BNC/COCA, Google Ngram Viewer) that can help us interpret the data we can find in dictionaries.
- \* 3/ How to collect, annotate and analyse oral English. The last part of the seminar will offer an introduction to the use of the speech analysis software PRAAT. We will discover what a spectrogram is in order to describe and analyse phonetic variation directly from audio recordings: personal, contextual, regional variation, etc. Do you remember what a sinusoid and wavelength are? In order to define and describe stress, vowels, consonants and intonation from an acoustic perspective, we will tackle



a few elements of physics through PRAAT, such as the distinction between noise and sounds, but also intensity, voice pitch and the formant structure of vowels.

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## Heures d'enseignement

Variation and change in Language - TD	Travaux Dirigés	12h
Variation and change in Language - CM	Cours Magistral	12h

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## Contrôle des connaissances

In order to be assessed, students will do an oral presentation – alone or in small groups – of some very modest but real piece of research to be conducted during the semester, bearing on a wide range of suggested or free topics, as if they were presenting the results of their personal research in a the symposium.