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Oleksandr Kapranov: A Systematic Analysis of Undergraduate EFL Courses in Phonetics and Phonology Offered by Leading Research-Intensive Universities in Norway
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A Systematic Analysis of Undergraduate EFL Courses in Phonetics and Phonology Offered by Leading Research-Intensive Universities in Norway

The article introduces and discusses a systematic analysis of undergraduate courses in phonetics and phonology in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) offered by the leading research-intensive universities in Norway, namely The University of Oslo (UiO) and The University of Bergen (UiB). The systematic analysis's specific research aim consists of identifying, classifying, and systematising the role of phonetics and phonology in undergraduate EFL curriculum designs and uncovering the similarities and differences between UiO and UiB. A corpus of course descriptions of undergraduate EFL modules in phonetics and phonology was collected and analysed. The results revealed that the undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology at UiO and UiB prioritised aspects of applied phonetics. In addition, they manifested connections to other undergraduate EFL courses, particularly courses in global Englishes, the structure of English, and Old English. The findings and their implications are discussed in the article.

Keywords: Curriculum design, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), phonetics, phonology, EFL undergraduate programmes

1. Introduction

This article sheds light on how courses in phonetics and phonology in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are represented in undergraduate curriculum design. Following Richards (2017), curriculum design is operationalised here as the course/module content and skills that EFL students acquire in an undergraduate programme. It involves a set of teaching and learning aims and activities, including their outcomes and evaluation. The study applies the aforementioned view of curriculum design to identify, systematise, and compare curricula designs of the courses in phonetics and phonology offered on the bachelor's level by the leading research-intensive universities in Norway, specifically The University of Oslo (UiO) and The University of Bergen (UiB).

Recent literature in applied linguistics and EFL studies indicates that phonetics and phonology constitute an important feature of EFL teaching and learning (Al-Ahdal, 2020; Bai & Yuan, 2019; Darcy, 2018; Derwing, 2008; Krulatz et al., 2016; Nguyen & Newton, 2020; Tergujeff, 2012). There is a consensus in the literature concerning the critical role of phonetics and phonology in undergraduate EFL

contexts, especially at the bachelor's (BA) level (Al-Ahdal, 2020; Benzies, 2013; Darcy et al., 2012; Gordon et al., 2013). It is argued that inadequate training in phonetics and phonology is concomitant with multiple challenges to EFL learners, especially on the beginner and intermediate level of EFL proficiency, thus resulting in miscommunication and breakdowns in speech fluency (Kapranov, 2013), as well as difficulties in oral communication in EFL (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Kapranov, 2021). Furthermore, teaching modules in phonetics and phonology are deemed to be beneficial in BA programmes, where a sufficient level of oral proficiency and adequate EFL pronunciation are required to take part in classroom discussions, oral presentations, and projects (Chien, 2014; Sordelli et al., 2022). In this regard, the pivotal issues of what and how to teach in terms of phonetics and phonology to undergraduate EFL students involve such considerations as, for instance, the status of these disciplines in the curriculum design, their embeddedness, or alternatively, separation from other teaching modules or courses, i.e., the structure of English, global Englishes, sociolinguistics, etc. (Darcy et al., 2021; Derwing, 2008; Kafes & Caner, 2020; Reynolds et al., 2021; Smit & Dalton, 2000).

While the importance of phonetics and phonology is indisputable in EFL studies (Krulatz et al., 2016; Nguyen & Newton, 2020), the role of phonetics and phonology in undergraduate curriculum designs remains underemphasised (Darcy, 2018; Derwing, 2008). Specifically, it is observed in the current studies that there is a paucity of research focusing on the place and status of phonetics and phonology in undergraduate EFL programmes (Darcy, 2018; Nguyen & Newton, 2020). Therefore, our study aims to provide a systematic analysis of the courses in phonetics and phonology in undergraduate EFL programmes offered by the leading research-intensive universities in Norway, namely UiO and UiB. The study systematically analyses the aforementioned universities' undergraduate EFL curriculum designs on their respective websites. The study, in particular, intends to answer the following research question (RQ):

RQ: What is the design of undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology that UiO and UiB offer?

Guided by the RQ, the article is structured in the following manner. First, an outline of the literature on phonetics and phonology in undergraduate EFL curriculum designs is provided in section 2. In section 3, the present study is introduced and discussed in conjunction with the RQ, the corpus of the study, results, and their analysis. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of findings and their linguo-didactic implications for the field of EFL studies.

2. Phonetics and Phonology in EFL Curriculum Design: A Literature Outline

There is a growing body of literature on the role of phonetics and phonology in EFL curricula (Alghazo, 2015; Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Derwing, 2008; Gajewska, 2021; Henderson et al., 2012; Kapranov, 2022a; Kirkova-Naskova et al., 2013). The literature attributes a crucial role to phonetics and phonology in undergraduate EFL curricula and, specifically, foregrounds their applied aspects, such as EFL pronunciation instruction (Kirkova-Naskova et al., 2013). The literature seems to be replete with EFL professionals' positive attitudes toward the applicability of phonetic and phonological competencies and skills to the EFL teaching and learning process (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Derwing, 2008; Gajewska, 2021; Henderson et al., 2012; Kapranov, 2022a, 2022b). However, research cautions against an impressionistic positive appraisal of phonetics and phonology in EFL settings that de-emphasises their relation to the curriculum design at hand (Keys, 2000; Parab, 2020). Critically, curriculum designs associated with undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology reflect many competing and intertwined variables (Derwing, 2008; Keys, 2000; Parab, 2020).

One of the variables involved in curriculum design associated with the courses and modules in EFL phonetics and phonology is manifested by contextual factors, for instance, Higher Education Institution (HEI) policies (Kirkova-Naskova et al., 2013) that may range from the general considerations of the HEI's ethos to such particulars as scheduling and the availability of teaching facilities (Parab, 2020). Additionally, contextual factors may involve the preferred theoretical paradigm that has gained currency at the given HEI, e.g., the teaching faculty have the expertise, training, and a longstanding tradition of teaching within the parameters of generative phonology, which, in turn, sets the tone for using the teaching materials and textbooks associated with the generative paradigm (Leather, 1983). Furthermore, the HEI policies may indicate a broader context of EFL teaching and learning, such as, for example, the HEI location in the country (e.g., Norway), whose inhabitants are considered to be highly proficient EFL speakers (Krulatz et al., 2016).

In addition to factoring in the HEI's policies, other variables may influence curriculum designs associated with undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology. Specifically, the theoretical advances in EFL didactics in general and applied aspects of EFL phonetics, in particular, could facilitate setting up the curriculum design that is reflective of the extent to which phonetics and phonology are integrated into other aspects of EFL instruction (Alghazo, 2015, p. 319). Given that phonetics and phonology cannot be dissociated from the rest of the EFL teaching and learning processes (Darcy, 2018), curriculum designs should factor in their interwovenness with other EFL courses and skills, especially speaking and listening (Alghazo, 2015; Darcy, 2018). Hence, research indicates

that some aspects of undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology could be embedded in other teaching modules, which, for instance, focus on oral communication or the structure of the English language (Darcy et al., 2021; Kafes & Caner, 2020; Kapranov, 2022b; Keys, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2021; Smit & Dalton, 2000).

Importantly, research points to the learner-specific variables in designing an EFL course in phonetics and phonology. These variables may involve, for instance, EFL learners' needs (Kapranov, 2020a), their linguistic and educational backgrounds (Parab, 2020), their personal learning goals, objectives, and trajectories (Derwing, 2008) inclusive of the learners' motivational factors (Florez, 1998), as well as the learners' social identity (Derwing, 2008), and their out-of-classroom exposure to English pronunciation (Martin, 2020), to mention just a few. These variables appear to be in unison with the following considerations:

- (a) the context in which a learner communicates, (b) the learner's perceived need or desire for pronunciation instruction, and (c) the speaker's intelligibility. (Derwing, 2008, p. 347)

Arguably, the list of potential variables involved in the design of undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology is open-ended due to institutional and personal factors. However, I agree with the general principles for designing an EFL curriculum in phonology (Darcy et al., 2012; Keys, 2000; Parab, 2020) that, presumably, could be applied to diverse HEI settings. Based upon the literature, it stands to reason that curriculum design in undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology should involve (i) the achievements of linguo-didactic theories and recent research in applied linguistics, (ii) the interrelatedness of the curriculum components within the curriculum as a whole, (iii) the connectedness with the institutional teaching policies and practices, and (iv) the adaptiveness of the curricular components to the instructors' and learners' needs (Darcy et al., 2012; Keys, 2000; Parab, 2020).

In summarising the literature, it is possible to observe that research is suggestive of the following two variables that, to a substantial extent, determine the curriculum design: HEI-related (e.g., the HEI's general guidelines and policies) and EFL learner-related (for instance, motivation, age, socio-linguistic background, etc.). It should be noted that while the aforementioned observations are drawn from various EFL instructional settings, they could, presumably, provide a framework for discussing undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology in tertiary contexts in Norway. Further, the article presents a study that systematically analyses how the leading research-intensive Norwegian HEIs design their curricula associated with undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology.

3. The Present Study

3.1. Preliminaries

As indicated in the introduction, the present study seeks to shed light on the place of undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology offered by the leading research-intensive universities in Norway, UiO, and UiB, respectively. While the focus of the study is on the Norwegian EFL tertiary contexts, it is relevant beyond Norway, given that the system of tertiary education is similar across Northern European countries (Palmisano et al., 2022), whose inhabitants exhibit a high level of EFL proficiency (Kapranov, 2019; Rogerson-Revell, 2007).

The study applies the research premises of a systematic review based on the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2015), which are transparent and consistent (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). In order to ensure the clarity of corpus collection, a set of specific inclusion criteria is adopted in the study. To specify, the corpus consists of the descriptions of undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology found on UiO and UiB's official websites. The websites are searched in English and Norwegian for undergraduate EFL programmes in phonetics and phonology that contain explicit course descriptions. It should be noted that only publicly available course descriptions are considered, i.e., the documents from the respective universities' intranets that require password-protected access are factored out. The focus of the search involves explicit mentions of EFL phonetics and phonology in the body of each course description. Notably, the search factors in only those online course descriptions available in 2023, whereas archived course descriptions are factored out from the search. To reiterate, post-graduate EFL programmes, including in-service post-diploma teacher training programmes, are excluded from the search.

The online texts that met the inclusion criteria were downloaded from the universities' websites and analysed. The descriptive statistics of the corpus (inclusive of the total number of words, means, and standard deviations) were computed in SPSS (IMB, 2011) and summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics of the Corpus

#	Descriptive Statistics	UiO	UiB
1	Total number of courses/course descriptions	4	3
2	Total number of words	3 353	3 052
3	Mean words	838.3	1017.3
4	Standard deviation words	67.4	36.5

In the following subsection, I will outline the context of the present research that involves undergraduate EFL studies at HEIs in Norway.

3.2. The Study Context: A Brief Outline

The use of the English language in Norway is extensive, and Norwegians are generally considered proficient EFL speakers (Brevik et al., 2016; Kapranov, 2020b; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Research indicates that several reasons account for the Norwegian EFL speakers' relatively high mastery of English, namely (i) the close typological distance between English and Norwegian (Hellekjær, 2009), (ii) extensive extramural exposure to English in everyday life through television, the Internet, travel to English-speaking countries, and interactions with foreign workers residing in Norway, in which English is used as a lingua franca (Kapranov, 2021), and (iii) the instructed and obligatory EFL learning from Year 1 of primary school to Year 10 of lower secondary school (Vattøy, 2019). Regarding the former, it should be observed that in Norway,

the English subject curriculum generally focuses on communication while refraining from giving advice concerning methods and/or approaches. Pronunciation is drawn attention to insofar as it makes communication possible, while understanding different varieties is the most explicit aim that deals with perception. There are no explicit directions concerning target varieties. All these factors underline the communicative focus in the Norwegian EFL curriculum (Rydland, 2016, p. 37)

There are no entrance tests or exams for prospective EFL students at Norwegian HEIs. The absence of entrance tests in EFL is based upon the premise that EFL instruction in secondary schools provides Norwegian school-leavers with adequate foundations and EFL skills to allow them to proceed to tertiary EFL studies (Hellekjær, 2009, p.199).

On the tertiary level, Norwegian undergraduate EFL students are offered several choices regarding the undergraduate programmes: (i) a stand-alone Year Course in English. The stand-alone EFL course typically combines aspects of grammar, phonetics, literature, and culture that are studied for two semesters or one year (hence, the name of the course). The Year Course in English is open to future teachers of English as well as to those undergraduates who do not pursue a teaching career; (ii) EFL as a module embedded in teacher education programmes, which are tailored to the needs of future EFL teachers. The EFL module is offered in three tracks that are not taken as a sequence, i.e., a future EFL teacher is free to choose one of the following, namely (a) EFL for primary school teachers in Years 1 – 7, (b) EFL for middle and lower secondary school teachers in Years 5 – 10, and (c) EFL for lower and upper secondary school in Years 8 – 13; and (iii) stand-alone undergraduate EFL courses on the bachelor's level (usually, one semester in duration) that are focused on one aspect of English language and literature (Krulatz et al., 2016).

3.3. Results and Discussion

Following the inclusion criteria, the systematic analysis of the undergraduate EFL programmes offered by UiO and UiB yielded four BA courses associated with phonetics and phonology at UiO and three at UiB. Two out of four courses at UiO are directly related to the disciplines of phonetics and phonology, specifically “English Phonetics and Intonation (EP&I)” and “Accents of English in the British Isles (Accents),” whereas in the courses “World Englishes (WE)” and “Old English: Language and History (OE)” phonetics and phonology seem to be embedded into other aspects of the English language. Notably, the course “EP&I” is a cornerstone module upon which the courses “Accents” and “WE” are based. These, as well as other findings, are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Undergraduate EFL Courses in Phonetics and Phonology at UiO

#	Course	EP&I	Accents	WE	OE
1	Prerequisites	Good proficiency in written and oral English	Course “EP&I”	Courses “English Grammar” “EP&I”	Course “English Grammar”
2	Focus	RP (BrE) GA (AmE)	Pronunciation varieties in England Wales Scotland Ireland	AmE and BrE variations in Syntax Morphology Vocabulary Phonology	Morpho-syntax Reading Translation Pronouncing OE texts
3	N hours	42 h	24 h	28 h	36 h
4	Assessment	4-h digital written exam	Term paper	Take home exam	4-h digital written exam
5	Language of the exam	English	English	English	English
6	ECTS	10	10	10	10
7	Text-books	Bird (2017) Bird (1997)	Hughes et al. (2012) Wells (1982)	Melchers et al. (2019)	Hasenfratz & Jambeck (2011) Higham & Ryan (2013)

It is evident from Table 2 that “EP&I” is oriented towards certain aspects of applied phonetics and EFL pronunciation rather than phonology. This observation is supported by the statement of learning outcomes that is given in (1):

- (1) After completing this course you will possess knowledge and awareness of English phonetics, know how to apply technical terms to describe and analyse English pronunciation, so that you can read and produce phonemic transcriptions and intonation transcriptions, be familiar with basic English intonation patterns and how they carry meaning, have a

pronunciation which is less affected by Norwegian or other non-English articulation and intonation, through insight combined with practice. (www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ilos/ENG1103)

The statement of obligatory activities provides further evidence of the applied phonetics orientation of the course. They involve the students' ability to classify the English vowels and consonants and write a phonemic dictation. Additionally, the course "EP&I" is characterised by the applied phonetics dimension that seeks to provide insight into the major varieties of English, which are represented by British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). Interestingly, the students are suggested to choose the variety they want to study in the course by themselves, e.g.

(2) Teaching in Received Pronunciation (British English) and General American (American English) is partly given separately in the groups. The students should therefore choose a group according to their choice of accent. (www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ilos/ENG1103)

In this regard, it should be mentioned that the students' free choice of the variety of English they want to communicate in and, in the case of the course "EP&I," they want to study at the tertiary level is a typical practice in Norwegian EFL contexts (Kapranov, 2019). The practice of choosing one's variety of English for instructional and communicative purposes is deeply rooted in the primary and secondary EFL settings in Norway, which do not mandate the obligatory variety of English. Conceivably, the free choice of choosing American or British English study tracks in the course "EP&I" reflects didactic principles that are referred to in the literature as learner-specific variables (i.e., the learners' needs, preferences, and personal objectives) in designing an EFL course curriculum in phonetics and phonology (Derwing, 2008; Florez, 1998; Kapranov, 2020a; Martin, 2020; Parab, 2020).

As previously mentioned, there seems to be a logical progression from the basic course "EP&I" to the courses "Accents" and "WE." However, the difference between these courses consists of the study foci that involve pronunciation varieties in the UK in "Accents" and the differences between American and British English in "WE." It should be noted that while "Accents" is anchored within phonetics and phonology, "WE" includes phonology to a lesser degree and prioritises the differences between the major varieties of English in terms of syntax, morphology, and vocabulary.

The progression from the introductory course to other BA courses in phonetics and phonology at UiO appears to be in line with the didactic literature that emphasises the interrelatedness of the curriculum components within the curriculum as a whole (Darcy et al., 2012; Keys, 2000; Parab, 2020). We can

regard the course “EP&I” as a prologue to the courses “Accents of English in the British Isles” and “WE” that connects them logically and didactically.

The UiO’s BA course “OE” is marginally related to phonetics and phonology since its focus rests on the morpho-syntactic structure of Old English, which is taught via such activities as reading, translating, and pronouncing a variety of texts (see Table 1).

Three undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology are available at UiB. They are systematised in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Undergraduate EFL Courses in Phonetics and Phonology at UiB

#	Course	System and Variation	Introduction to English Studies	Sounds and Structures
1	Prerequisites	None	None	None
2	Focus	Lexicon Semantics Phonology	Grammar Phonetics Language variation and change	Phonetics Phonology Grammar
3	N hours	48 h	24 h	60 h
4	Assessment	A 5-h digital exam	3 essays	A 5-h digital exam
5	Language of the exam	English	English	English
6	ECTS	15	10	15
7	Textbooks	Not specified	Not specified	Hannisdal & Nilsen (2022) Lobeck & Denham (2014)

Similarly to UiO, UiB offers an undergraduate foundation course in English phonetics and phonology. The course titled “Sounds and Structures” focuses on phonetics and phonology, as well as on grammar, as evident from the course outcomes that are stated in the course description:

(3) Students are able to analyse, describe and explain basic topics in grammar, phonetics and phonology, using appropriate terminology; use language data to discuss and contextualize syntactic and morphological structures and phenomena use linguistic material to discuss and explain phonetic and phonological concepts and use appropriate symbols to transcribe English pronunciation and intonation demonstrate and employ key research abilities in solving set problems.

(<https://www.uib.no/en/course/ENG110>)

It is seen in (3) that the course interrelates phonetics and phonology with other EFL disciplines (e.g., grammar), which appears to be in concord with the literature (Darcy et al., 2021; Kafes & Caner, 2020; Kapranov, 2022; Keys, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2021; Smit & Dalton, 2000) that posits that phonetics and phonology on the

undergraduate EFL level could be taught synchronously with the related EFL fields.

In the same vein, the undergraduate EFL course “Introduction to English Studies” combines the focus on phonetics and phonology with grammar and variation. The combination is manifested in the course description as follows:

(4) The student has a basic understanding of linguistics as discipline, and some of the topics that pertain, like for instance English grammar, phonetics, language variations- and change, attitudes to language and history of language; has a basic knowledge of the tools and techniques used in relation to linguistic data and sources; has a basic understanding of a selection of fundamental concepts and/or methods in linguistics. (<https://www.uib.no/en/course/ENG100>)

Analogously to the previous two courses, the embeddedness of phonetics and phonology in a broader context of EFL-related disciplines is seen in the undergraduate EFL course “System and Variation” curriculum design. As its name suggests, the course pays attention to the variational properties of lexicon, phonology, and semantics and addresses phonological and morphosyntactic variation in English, as illustrated by excerpt (5):

(5) The language system module surveys one or more of the central components of the English language such as the lexicon, semantics, phonology, morphology or syntax. The English language variation module surveys some of the kinds of phonological and/or morphosyntactic variation that are found in different varieties of English. (<https://www.uib.no/en/course/ENG120>)

Judging from the systematic analysis of the UiB’s curriculum design associated with the undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology, it seems feasible to summarise that they exhibit a marked tendency towards the inclusion of these two disciplines into a broader linguistic context. In contrast to UiO, where at least one course appears to be centred exclusively on phonetics and phonology, UiB’s courses could be described as more integrated, given that they address phonetics and phonology alongside syntax, morphology, and semantics. Also, it should be observed that, unlike UiO, UiB does not offer undergraduate courses in phonetics and phonology that are taught under the aegis of the course in Old English.

Conclusions

The article discussed an analysis of curriculum designs of the undergraduate EFL courses in phonetics and phonology offered by the leading research-intensive universities in Norway, UiO, and UiB. The investigation established that the courses manifested an applied phonetics dimension oriented towards the varieties of English and Old English at UiO and the variation and change of English designed with the co-presence of other EFL-related disciplines (e.g., grammar) at UiB.

While the findings of the analysis were based upon the undergraduate EFL curricula in tertiary EFL settings in Norway, the results could first be applicable to a range of other EFL contexts in Northern Europe. The present analysis will hopefully provide EFL professionals and curriculum designers with the following linguo-didactic suggestions. First, judging from the findings, it would be desirable to offer one foundation course in phonetics and phonology that would provide insight into the phonetic inventory and phonological system of English. Second, subsequent to the introductory course in phonetics and phonology, it would be reasonable to offer two or three interrelated undergraduate EFL courses that would consider phonetics and phonology within, or alongside other EFL-related disciplines, for instance, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

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