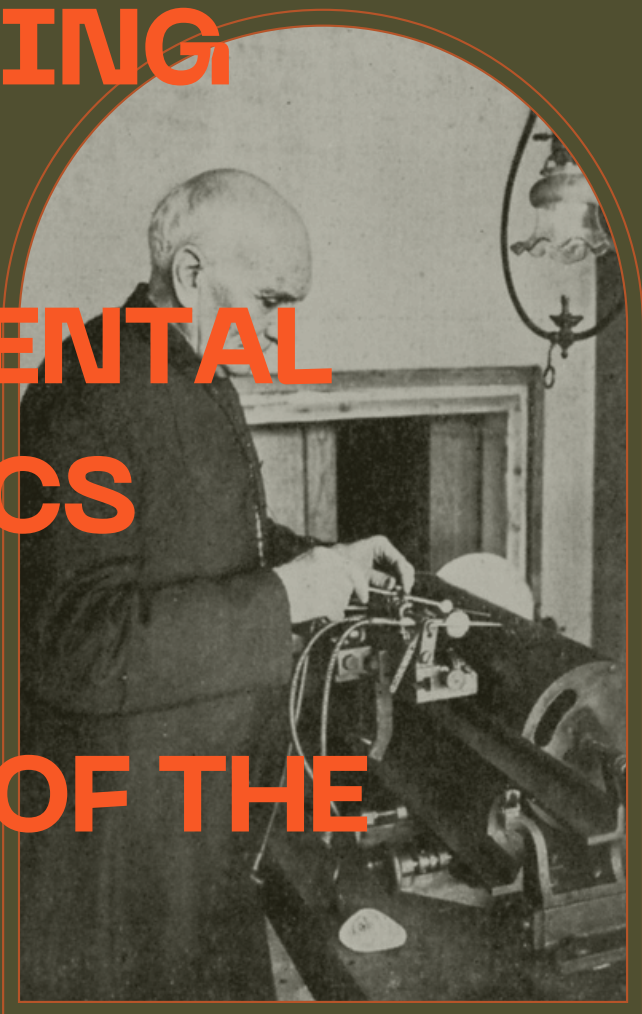


Sound/Language Research Seminar

# COLONISING THE EAR: EXPERIMENTAL PHONETICS AND THE TAMING OF THE TONGUE



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**Join online at:**

[teams.microsoft.com/meet/381869396701755?](https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/381869396701755?p=lsVqCXOgvdLCvLEHEI)

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Meeting ID: 381 869 396 701 755

Passcode: 2kJ9PQ3Y

May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026

16:30–18.00

Samuel Alexander Building

Room A104

Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a range of technologies and institutional systems emerged with the aim of representing and regulating the sonic dimensions of language and voice. Devices such as the phonograph promoted new modes of listening, while the proliferation of pedagogical linguistic and vocal recordings fostered the idea that the tongue and ear themselves could be trained towards a more “correct” use of language. These new regimes of inscription and reproduction did not simply translate pre-existing sonic imaginaries into new formats, but rather created new scientific discourses embedded in broader political projects related to imperialism, internal colonisation, and the configuration of mass culture. Whether linked to national consolidation, colonial impulses or social regulation, the disciplining of speech became central to the prestige and scientific configuration of “experimental phonetics” — as famously dramatized in works such as *Pygmalion* (Bernard Shaw).

**This seminar explores the transformations and continuities of these early sound cultures, focusing on how they produced specific regimes of audibility and vocal practice across national and transnational contexts. Bringing together perspectives on experimental phonetics, musicology and the literary voice, it examines how phonetic laboratories and discourses developed techniques for training, taming and mediating vocal expression, and how these intersected with broader aesthetic, political, and cultural concerns in given national and imperial contexts.**