

Teaching Portfolio

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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Learning about language entails two separate discoveries: that we can scientifically interrogate what looks like the most pedestrian component of our daily routine – the use of words to communicate; and that the evidence to answer these questions need not be sought for in books or archives, but is available within us, grounded in the intuitions that every language user can rely on. As an instructor, I capitalize on these two aspects of linguistics to endow students with a sense of *empowerment*. As I help them acquire the tools to autonomously seek and discover the patterns lurking behind words and sounds, I invite them to repackage what was taken for granted into an object of intellectual curiosity, leading them to open a window into understanding a component of our worldly experience that goes well beyond the technicalities of how grammars work. To achieve this goal, I strive to actively involve students in as many parts of the class as possible, by either inviting them to share their personal experience about a relevant topic – e.g., the distinction between *Jocks* and *Burnouts*, foundational categories in American teenager culture as well as in sociolinguistic research – or by collecting their intuitions on the phenomena discussed on a particular day. Reaching out for the students' input allows the classroom to build a body of evidence to evaluate the claims of studies and theories discussed in class, while acquainting students with the practice of interrogating language for meaningful patterns.

Actively prompting for class participants' own personal knowledge of language can also serve as an inclusion strategy directed at international or otherwise shy students who, despite full English proficiency, tend to be more hesitant to speak in public. In particular, the value that linguistics places on comparing and contrasting data from different languages provides a natural resource to turn a potential challenge into an opportunity for pedagogical and empirical enrichment. For example, I systematically prompt non-native speakers for data and insights about how the phenomenon that we are discussing manifests itself in their own mother tongue. For those who are too shy to share their data in class, I offer the possibility of emailing them to me privately, so that I can include them in the following lecture. The data set resulting from these contributions serves as a live demonstration of the range of variation that distinguishes the grammars from different languages, emerging as particularly effective teaching materials.

However, there is much more to linguistics than the seductive power of highly accessible insights. As a field of scientific inquiry, this discipline entails the act of connecting data to the broader questions designed to tap into the structure of human language. For this reason, I believe that no adequate understanding of what linguistics is – even at the most introductory level – can be reached without grappling with the practice of turning a set of empirical observations into broader, tenable generalizations. This task is certainly challenging, and frequently perceived by the classroom as more tedious than the excitement that comes with the raw data. Yet, “taming” our naïve speakers' enthusiasm with the rigor required by the standards of scientific inquiry is a necessary step to fully appreciate what makes linguistics unique among other ways of talking about language. I believe that two ingredients can be particularly helpful to guide students in this process: a systematic discussion of how full-fledged experimental methods can be used to test linguistic hypotheses, and a healthy skepticism of any taken-for-granted answer.

The recent development of lab-based experimental techniques across subfields constitutes an invaluable asset not just to enhancing our knowledge in the field, but also to showing in a transparent way *how* such knowledge can be reached and expanded. As such, in introductory and more advanced courses alike, I always make sure to devote sufficient time to discussing these studies, seeing them as a formidable pedagogical resource in at least two respects. First, by providing an overt, step-by-step breakdown of the different research stages, they help students internalize the logic of the scientific method, providing concrete examples of how the same scaffold can be used to explore very different linguistic questions and phenomena. To achieve this goal, I seek out opportunities to involve the classroom both before discussing the actual study – for example, inviting the students to outline the predicted results for each condition – and after it – for example, by encouraging students to identify what issues remain unanswered, and how

these could be tested through a follow up investigation. Second, discussing experimental work contributes to rendering the phenomena of interest more relatable and tangible, either because the studies involve amusing behavioral tasks – such as the use of puppets in acquisition studies – or because they show that the abstract theoretical constructs that we employ to model human language are reflected in measurable, highly concrete cognitive tasks.

At the same time, I believe that no curiosity can be developed without a moderately *skeptical* attitude towards our object of study. While theoretical assumptions are important, few of them are really indispensable to propose insightful explanations about language. As such, I strive to lead the students to discover the limits of such concepts, rather than providing ready-made definitions. An especially rewarding teaching moment came when I once invited the class to identify the different units of meaning contained in words that are notoriously impervious to being broken down into different subparts. Students were not only able to individuate the puzzle, but actively proposed solutions to account for the data, for example suggesting the presence of a “ghost morpheme” (in the student’s words) that represents a singular number in English nouns. This exercise helped us see the limitations of the notion of morpheme as had been discussed in lecture, while allowing the class to contribute to improving the theory. It thus constituted both an exciting moment of discovery, and a window into the process whereby scientific knowledge about language is continuously revised and refined.

Instilling curiosity and skepticism in students requires the ability to reach out to every student on a personal level. I rely on two core pedagogical strategies to achieve this goal. First, I endorse the use of naturally occurring data – especially those from highly accessible sources like TV series and movies – in lectures and assignments. Besides making materials more relatable, this practice also allows students to get acquainted with the pervasiveness of linguistic phenomena, all the while giving them a taste of the difficulty of applying theoretical concepts to real world data. When I assigned an entire final take home exam on the TV Series *Fargo*, my efforts were rewarded by numerous emails thanking me for making the assignment fun while drawing students’ attention to an enjoyable show. Second, I strive to treat students as scholars, rather than just learners, fostering a personal and intellectual conversation that extends beyond the classroom. On the one hand, I seek to involve them in my research, encouraging them to come to my presentations and highly valuing their feedback. On the other hand, I constantly strive to feed their curiosity and intellectual eagerness. For example, if they show particular interest in a topic that we could not cover in detail in class, I direct them to specific research articles, offering to meet individually to discuss them. I see the challenges and rewards of engaging with the scientific literature as a tremendous pedagogical strategy to fuel students’ interest and critical thinking and push them to take ownership of their own projects.

Finally, completion of the University of Chicago Writing Intern training program, combined with my experience as a teaching assistant, allowed me to develop the pedagogical skills to help students refine their scholarly writing. In this respect, nothing proved to be better training ground than grading substantial amounts of syntax and semantics problem sets, all of which required students to build a cogent argument on the basis of previously given data. When assessing students’ performance, I especially focus on the warrant that links their response to the provided data, inviting them to make explicit all the steps that led to their proposed solution. Zeroing on the empirical basis of a claim, especially when such a claim is self-evident (e.g., “*table* is a noun, not a verb”), can easily make the students frustrated. Yet, it is precisely the rigor of the empirical argumentation that makes linguists’ claims replicable and falsifiable, and thus different from more impressionistic ways of describing language. I therefore believe that emphasizing this component of the writing process, and providing writers with concrete suggestions on how to improve it, is a crucial part to being an instructor in linguistics. Not only does this emphasis lead students to improve their performance on assignments and papers; more broadly, it also helps them turn from consumers to producers of knowledge, preparing them for a transition that, regardless of the professional path that they will undertake, necessarily awaits them in adulthood.

Teaching Experience, Responsibilities, and Training

Experience as main instructor:

University of Pennsylvania

- **Spring 2021 Semantics II.** [Syllabus](#)
 - **Notes on the course:** Advanced graduate course in semantics, focusing on intensional semantics applied to the analysis of phenomena such as propositional attitudes, modals, exclusive operators, predicates of personal taste and others. Co-taught with Florian Schwarz.

University of Paris 7-Diderot:

- **Fall 2018 Social Meaning (hosted by the University of the Basque Country)**
 - **Notes on the course:** The class provides a compact introduction to the study of social meaning, with a special emphasis on the integration between sociolinguistic, semantic and pragmatic approaches to this topic. The audience includes members of the host university at large, ranging from undergraduate students to faculty members.

University of Konstanz:

- **Winter 2017 Introduction to sociolinguistics.** [Syllabus](#)
 - **Notes on the course:** The class provides an introduction to the study of language in the social context. It is taken by undergraduate students interested in pursuing a BA in linguistics or a language-related discipline, and a career in teaching or language pedagogy. It is the only course in this area offered at the University of Konstanz.
 - **Summer 2017 Intensification: between logic, discourse and social meaning.** **Notes on the course:** The course was taught at **ESSLLI 2017**, the European Summer School in Logic, Language and Information. It is an advanced seminar that relies on intensification as case study to invite discussion and critical reflection on different aspects of human communication, and in particular on how the logical component of linguistic meaning connects to the socio-indexical value of linguistic forms. Co-taught with Yaron McNabb.
- **Spring 2017: Semantics I.** [Syllabus](#)
 - **Notes on the course:** The class is the first part of a 3-semester sequence in the study of formal semantics and pragmatics. It is taken by undergraduate students interested in pursuing a BA in linguistics or a language-related discipline. It typically represents the first opportunity of exposure to formal linguistics for students who would eventually decide to pursue an MA and a Ph.D in linguistics

University of Chicago:

- **Spring 2015: Introduction to Linguistics.** [Syllabus](#)
 - **Notes on the course:** The class, consisting of about 40 students, is taken by lower division students considering majoring in Linguistics, or by students who are pursuing a different major and have an independent interest in the study of language. The class is also a prerequisite for all other undergraduate courses in linguistics.

Experience as a Teaching Assistant:

- Spring 2014: Introduction to Linguistics. Instructor: Tim Grinsell
- Fall 2013: Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics. Instructor: Peter Klecha
- Fall 2012 Teaching Assistant. Introduction to Syntax. Instructor: Karlos Arregi
-

Responsibilities as a teaching assistant: Running weekly discussion sections, grading and providing comments on weekly homework assignments, meeting with students, contributing with guest lectures and regularly briefing the instructor concerning issues that would emerge in the discussion section and in the class.

Further qualifications and experience:

- **Spring 2014, Pedagogies of Writing training seminar**

Notes: This training program, run by the University of Chicago Writing program, gave me the skills requires to initiate students to the challenges of scholarly writing, qualifying me to serve as Writing Interns in the Humanities Core classes at the University of Chicago (required for all freshmen). The training includes both a theoretical and an applied component, in which I practiced giving comments on essays, running seminars on specific writing-related issues and designing assignments and exercises geared to help students develop their argumentative skills.

- **Summer 2016: Certificate in University Teaching**

Notes: Run by the University of Chicago Teaching Center, this program allowed me to attend a series of seminars and workshops that helped me critically reflect on the teaching and the learning process while exposing me to the feedback and advice of experienced instructors and mentors across different disciplines. The Certificate has been released upon satisfactory completion of a Pedagogy Seminar and an individual teaching consultation, in which my teaching was observed, videotaped and evaluated by specialists from the Teaching Center.

Areas of Teaching Expertise and Proposals for Classes of Interest

My cross-disciplinary research program, along with my interest in topics and approaches within and outside the boundaries of linguistics, allows me a great amount of flexibility in the range of classes that I am qualified to teach. Such areas include:

- Undergraduate introductory courses
- Undergraduate and graduate course/seminars **in semantics, pragmatics, syntax psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, historical linguistics**
- Topic-driven undergraduate and graduate seminars geared towards exploring a specific conceptual or methodological issue. I see such classes as a great opportunity for graduate and advanced undergraduate students to gain exposure to current debates in the field, and to recruit and re-combine in novel ways the knowledge acquired in previous classes.

Doctrines of linguistic correctness: Re-evaluating the descriptive/prescriptive distinction –

We are taught that prescriptive, folk-oriented approaches to language should be dismissed as irrelevant, in contrast to the descriptive neutrality of linguistic science. By dissecting several proposals (e.g., Deborah Cameron's in *Verbal Hygiene*) that problematizes this view, the course aims to foster discussion and critical thinking on a topic that is central to every speaker's experience, and to any scientific enterprise focusing on language. We will combine the theoretical discussion with close analysis of salient case studies – e.g. double negation, agreement mismatches, non-literal *literally*, preposition stranding – to tap into the processes whereby linguistic phenomena are made sense of and explained by both linguists and naïve speakers. The course enhances interdisciplinary and breadth of thought by assigning readings from a wide variety of perspectives, including formal linguistics, psycho/sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and media commentaries on language. [Sample syllabus.](#)

Experimenting with meaning - Experimental methods have acquired a central role in theoretically-informed linguistic research. Part of their appeal lies in the fact that they allow us to “see” the tangible, behavioral correlates of otherwise highly abstract concepts, serving as a testing ground for theories and frameworks. The class will explore how the adoption of lab-based tasks has transformed the enterprise of studying linguistic meaning. By engaging with recent work in a variety of semantic and pragmatic domains (e.g. implicatures, presuppositions, number words), we will use this research as a window into how the scientific method can be applied to test fine-grained linguistic hypotheses. [Sample syllabus.](#)

Meaning: from its logical to its social aspects – Linguistic expressions carry two kinds of *meaning*. On the one hand, they are conventionally associated with a *semantic* meaning, such as an object/concept in the world or a logical operator. On the other hand, they index a *social* meaning, that is, a package of socio-psychological qualities that consciously or unconsciously convey information on speakers' identity (Eckert 1989). Yet, despite the common label, these varieties of meaning are normally assumed to be completely unrelated. In this class we aim to problematize this separation, focusing on cases in which the features of the semantic meaning appear to be related in a principled fashion to the social meaning of the expression. These include intensifiers like *totally*, discourse markers like *eh?* and “verbal crutches” like *literally* and *like*. After examining evidence that speakers make use of semantic knowledge to make social evaluations about speakers, we will consider the possibility of adopting a more comprehensive notion of the category of meaning in natural language, in which both the semantic and the social components conspire to determine what content linguistic expressions “convey”.

Teaching Assessment and Evaluations from Students

I provide a representative sample of the student evaluations received as an instructor, providing my critical reflections and comments on the most representative answers. I also append a third party report on a lecture provided by the University of Chicago Teaching Center. **Full evaluations are available upon request.**

Semantics II (University of Pennsylvania, Spring 2021)

Advanced semantics graduate course focusing on the analysis of meaning in natural language within the framework of intentional semantics. After introducing the formal system in the first half of the course, we focused on how those tools could be used to shed light on case studies that are currently drawing considering attention in the literature: modality, propositional attitudes, questions, exclusive operators, and predicates of personal taste. Students were pushed to enhance their technical skills and familiarity with the systems via regular take-home assignments; they were also encouraged to identify an empirical puzzle that they found interesting to tackle in their term paper. Multiple papers from the course have turned into conference presentations and are being currently further developed as part of the students' research.

| | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| Overall quality of the instructor | Poor | Fair | Good | Very Good | Excellent |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50% | 50% |
| Question | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| The instructor clearly communicated the subject matter. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50% | 50% |
| The instructor stimulated my interest. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25% | 75% |
| The instructor was available outside of class. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25% | 75% |
| As a result of taking this course, I have a better understanding of actual knowledge, principles and/or theories in this area. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50% | 50% |
| This course helped me improve my ability to analyze, solve problems and think critically. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25% | 75% |
| This course helped me to understand how this field asks and answers questions. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25% | 75% |
| This course challenged me to consider new ideas, concepts, or ways of thinking. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100% |
| As a result of taking this course, I am more excited by this field of study. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100% |

Full report of qualitative responses

Does the instructor teach in a manner such that students like you can succeed?

Yes, definitely! Andrea prepared his handouts carefully, was very knowledgeable about the field, and explained the materials in a manner that's very easy for us to understand and absorb.

Yes. Andrea is a great instructor. He comes up with great illustration examples, and some of them very humorous. He gave detailed feedback to me on the text and during office hours.

Yes-- I especially appreciated the high degree of personalization and encouragement for each student to pursue projects of particular interest to them.

Andrea's teaching style is engaging and deeply respectful - both of the subject matter and of the students. Andrea never tries to make a problem seem easier than it is, and he showed great appreciation of student questions and contributions throughout the class.

Has this been a valuable course for you to take? Why or why not?

Absolutely! I learned so much about semantics and the discussions in class are very interesting and stimulating.

Very valuable. I like the course content and the small classroom dynamics.

Yes-- I enjoyed delving into contentious and tricky parts of semantic theory, and viewing it now from the perspective of someone in the field.

This has been a valuable course for me to take because it provided a great opportunity to dive into current topics in the semantics literature in a guided way.

How has the instructor shown his or her interest in the subject?

Yes! He definitely knows a lot about the field, was very excited about the subject and would love to explore it with us.

Andrea is very engaged with each of our projects. I get the sense that he must be interested in any puzzle related to semantics in general, as we can see from the class.

Andrea is very clearly invested in and enthusiastic about the material. Students were given lots of encouragement that their thoughts were valuable and interesting.

Andrea seemed extremely invested in the subject matter each week, and always managed to bring out clearly why he thought that the particular topic or paper was relevant to students' projects.

Have you found this course challenging?

I think the course is challenging in the right way in that it encourages me to think about the materials, utilize the tools and develop my own analysis.

It was a little challenging at the beginning. But when the course moved to specific topics, I find that we have lots of time to work on our own.

I found the course to be appropriately challenging for a graduate-level course. Original and independent research was expected, which is the typical standard for such courses.

Everything is challenging during a pandemic - but this course always felt like a safe space, even online, where difficult questions were posed but no one was put on the spot to answer them.

Language in Culture and Society (University of Konstanz, Winter 2018)

Undergraduate Introduction to the study of language in the social context, with a strong emphasis on studying phenomena from different languages and speech communities. I taught the class in a seminar format, assigning weekly articles from literature in sociolinguistics, anthropology and dialectology, and making an effort to provide the students with materials that they would relate to on a culture level (e.g., by discussing phenomena drawn from their own range of native languages and speech communities including Turkish, German, Catalan, English). While students sometimes did find these materials challenging, they expressed appreciation for the opportunity of participating to discussion and developing their own ideas. Students were asked to write critical response papers and deeply involved in class discussion; the final assignment consisted of a small original research paper, a proposal for which had to be presented in class on the final day.

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| This course met my expectations | 0 | 0 | 0 | 33% | 67% |
| The content of this course was presented at the appropriate level | 0 | 0 | 0 | 33% | 67% |
| The instructor held my attention and made the course interesting | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100% |
| The instructor organized the course clearly | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100% |
| The instructor stimulated and facilitated class discussion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100% |
| Complex issues are explained in a way which is easy to understand. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100% |

Full report of qualitative responses

What I find good about the course is...

“Everything! :-)”

“The friendly atmosphere”

“The use of articles and papers to explain the theoretical points of the classes.”

“The students are very much included (with discussions, asking their opinions, etc.)”

What I find less good about the course is...

“Some of the papers are very complex”

Semantics I (University of Konstanz, Spring 2017)

Introduction to semantics for undergraduates. Students were enthusiastic about the continued opportunity to intervene during lecture. They also expressed appreciation for the clarity of the lectures and the overall structure of the course. Some students also pointed out that the lectures were sometimes a bit fast-paced. I find this concern reasonable. While this was students' first exposure to semantics, it is also one of the only two courses in formal semantics offered at the university. As such, the course is designed to provide an in-depth discussion of issues in compositional semantics, both at the empirical and at the formal level, in a relatively short amount of time. I will do my best to adjust accordingly when teaching a similar class in the future, making sure to pause, review and provide as many examples as needed.

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| This course met my expectations | 0 | 0 | 20% | 40% | 40% |
| The content of this course was presented at the appropriate level | 0 | 0 | 10% | 10% | 80% |
| The instructor held my attention and made the course interesting | 0 | 0 | 11% | 33% | 56% |
| The instructor organized the course clearly | 0 | 0 | 30% | 10% | 60% |
| The instructor stimulated and facilitated class discussion | 0 | 0 | 10% | 30% | 60% |
| Complex issues are explained in a way which is easy to understand. | 0 | 0 | 10% | 70% | 20% |

Full report of qualitative responsesWhat I find good about the course is...

"We can ask questions at any time and the teaching is excellent!"

"I really like the structure and the lectures."

"Thanks for always getting the class to participate, for always drawing the bigger picture, and for showing that logic is necessary for semantics."

"He explains everything again with good examples if it hasn't been understood before."

"The lecturer is very approachable and gives us many active participation opportunities."

What I find less good about the course is...

"Maybe he could sometimes slow down a bit, because he explains very fast"

"Sometimes the theories are hard to understand without more examples."

Introduction to Linguistics (UChicago, Spring 2015)

The evaluations of my performance as an instructor were highly positive and speak to three important qualities of my teaching: (i) clarity and organization; (ii) my commitment to foster curiosity and interest; (iii) active engagement with the classroom. As far as weaknesses are concerned, a few students manifested the desire for more explicit definitions of concepts. While taking these comments as a motivation to be as clear as possible in the future, I partially see them as reflecting the decision to emphasize analysis and critical thinking over notions/definitions.

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| This course met my expectations | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20% | 80% |
| The content of this course was presented at the appropriate level | 0 | 0 | 13% | 7% | 80% |
| The instructor held my attention and made the course interesting | 0 | 0 | 6% | 27% | 67% |
| The instructor organized the course clearly | 0 | 0 | 14% | 13% | 73% |
| The instructor stimulated class discussion | 0 | 0 | 13% | 20% | 67% |
| The instructor motivated independent thinking | 0 | 0 | 14% | 13% | 73% |

Selected qualitative responses

What were the instructor's strengths? Weaknesses?

"Strengths: Presented clearly organized lectures, good public speaker, attempted to answer questions fully, and made clear guides to help you study for the exams. Weaknesses: None that I can think of"

"Andrea is a great lecturer. I think his only weakness is that while he was very good at giving examples of concepts, he didn't always define/explain them first, so sometimes you had to go back and try to figure out a definition yourself when the homework asked for it."

"Andrea is very passionate about linguistics, and it really shows. He has a good sense for when, how often, and at what difficulty to pitch us questions during lecture, so classes felt more like 75% lecture and 25% discussion. This along with his sense of humor in person and in his slides kept me engaged."

"Andrea was very organized and clear. He tried to keep things interesting with clips from popular culture, and greatly encouraged us to be curious, ask questions, and be critical of what we were learning."

"Andrea is obviously passionate about linguistics and tried to get the class interested, too. He's awesome at making things relatable and hyperexplaining what we don't understand."

How has this course contributed to your education?

“It convinced me that linguistics is the topic for me. Thanks Andrea!”

“Linguistics crosses into two interests of mine: psychology and foreign language. The whole class makes you take a deeper look at the elements of language that we take for granted.”

“I took this course on a whim, and I'm really glad I took it. I think about topics in linguistics often now, and it's really cool to see them manifest in everyday life, or in my psychology or philosophy classes.”

“Intro to Linguistics provided a grounding in each of the major subtopics of Linguistics and made me interested in the subject, while teaching me how to think more critically and analytically about the language that we use in our everyday lives.”

“I loved this class. Made me want to major in linguistics, and I'm taking phonology next quarter.”

“Andrea was an awesome instructor and taught me so much that I never would have thought I would be interested in.”

Winter 2020: Introduction to sociolinguistics (University of Pennsylvania, SAIL format)

The evaluations concern a weeklong sequence of guest lectures I organized as part of an undergraduate Introduction to Sociolinguistics course taught in the [Structured, Active, In-Class Learning \(SAIL\)](#) format. This format is based on the goal of leading students to actively engage with course content through structured activities during class time. During the week, I involved students in a series of activities aimed at reflecting on the social significance of discourse markers known as “verbal crutches” in folk theories of language — e.g., *totally*, *low-key* and other epistemic adverbs. Students were asked by instructor Meredith Tamminga to provide reflective feedback on their experience with the activities as part of a homework assignment. The comments weren't solicited by me and are being reported after obtaining consent from all the students.

I really liked the way the professor had us rate and craft the sentences ourselves. I have never seen or heard sentences that were intentionally crafted to sound "wrong," and making some with my teammates was both eye-opening and a good bonding experience.

From the lesson, I learned that even words that may seem meaningless add a lot of nuance to our sentences. Because of this, they have linguistic value, even though they may not be professional or academic!

I've always thought of "totally" as a for-all situations term and never thought about the appropriate usage of "totally". However, I left the second lecture with a completely new view of crutch words. Crutch words may not provide any additional literal meaning to a phrase, but meaning goes beyond dictionary definitions.

I found Dr. Beltrama's lecture particularly interesting because it analyzed the grammatical rules of the usage of filler words which is not something that many consciously think about, but most are aware of them. The in-class activity and the totally/lowkey example illuminated to me the fact that these words which we incorporate into our grammar actually have formal rules and can be used incorrectly/correctly.

The two classes we had with the guest lecturer was super cool, I had never heard of crutch words before, and thinking critically about the word "totally" was very interesting. I think it is really amazing when we start to wonder about why we do such things. Without thinking critically about it, we have all these rules about "totally" and "lowkey" that were never established or agreed upon. Yet there is a general consensus on how to use them.

I was really engaged with Dr. Beltrama's research last week. As a young person, it is always fun to examine the intricacies of my generation's language explored and shown to be worthy of study and importance. It was just a really impressive moment for the class to collaborate on this new research, and for Dr. Beltrama to begin grasping and formalizing the socio-semantics (maybe that's what it's called?) of the word's syntax and varying meanings.

Teaching Materials: a Sample Assignment

I include below the final assignment for Introduction to Linguistics, The assignment speaks to three important aspects of my teaching philosophy.

- It shows my commitment to leading students to autonomously discover patterns in language use, applying the notions learned in class in a dynamic fashion. This especially emerges in part 2 of the assignment (highlighted below), when students are asked to apply the principles of Gricean pragmatics to selected dialogues.
- It fosters critical thinking by pushing the students to simultaneously consider and assess different analytical perspectives – e.g., by asking them to analyze the data from both a variationist and a “third wave” sociolinguistic angle in question 3.3 (highlighted below).
- It emphasizes the importance of using engaging, independently relatable material, often drawn from cultural references shared across the class. As anecdotal but telling evidence, I received various separate emails from students at the end of the course thanking me for making them discover not only linguistics, but also a fascinating movie and TV series.

LING 20001:

In honor of Lorne Malvo and the wonderful land of 10,000 lakes

Watching the series Fargo, as well as the Coen Brothers' movie that inspired it, should be a requirement for any Intro to Linguistics class. Since I wasn't allowed to change the Syllabus to reflect this, let me at least try to inculcate some of my personal worship for the wonderful figure of Lorne Malvo. If you are not familiar with the series, just watch it. Yet, no background knowledge is assumed for this assignment, except for knowing that Lorne Malvo is the one driving the car that gets pulled over, and is not afraid to kill. So, watch out!

Note: The assignment is due June 1 at 5 pm for graduating seniors and June 3rd before class for all other students.

Part 1: the basics

Watch the following clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTmdU-x8pCo>.

Consider what Malvo says between 1:19 and 1:25. It includes three different sentences. The first word should be “We”, the last one should be “car”.

1.1 Orthography matters after all!

Provide an orthographic representation of the sentences uttered; in other words, write it. [10 points]

1.2 Phonetic Transcription

Transcribe the sentences phonetically. Worry only about segmental contrasts; do not worry about prosody or very subtle contrasts in vowel quality or syllabicity. But do worry about aspiration, though! [20 points]

1.3 Morphosyntax

List the morphemes in the transcribed sentences and list for each of them: (i) morphosyntactic category, if it is a word (Verb, Adjective, Noun etc); (ii) basic meaning, if it is a content morpheme; (iii) inflectional features. These should include any applicable combination of case, person, number and gender. In case inflectional features are not contributed by a specialized morpheme, specify them for the morpheme they attach to. If a morpheme occurs twice, list it twice (or as many times it occurs). And keep in mind that a morpheme might occur twice, and yet have different inflectional features. You should list 20 items. Forewarned is forearmed! [50 points]

1.4 Syntax

Individuate three constituents, each of a different type, from the sentences that you transcribed above. Prove that they are constituents by running two constituency tests for each. Name the tests. It is fine to repeat the same tests for the different sequences. It is not fine to pick single words. We already know that they are constituents! [10 points each]

Individuate three sequences of words in the sentence that are not constituents. Prove that they are not constituents by running two constituency tests for each. Name the tests. It is fine to repeat the same tests for different sequences. [10 points each]

1.5 Human language

We talked about the features that make human language different from, say, animal communication. These included arbitrariness of meanings and displaceability of sentences. Show how each of them emerge in the clip, provide an example for each of them, and motivate your answer. [20 points]

Part 2: Malvo meets Grice.

Now watch the clip again. Focus on the part after 1:20, in particular. By relying on Grice's model of conversation, provide an analysis of Malvo's response in italics. In doing so, be sure to spell out the following components: (i) literal meaning; (ii) pragmatic interpretation/implicature; (iii) maxim(s) that help(s) us derive the implicature, and reasoning whereby they do so. Keep into consideration the broader context of the clip when answering these questions. And please, be explicit! [20 points each]

At 1:37:

- (1) Malvo: You could go get in your car and drive away.
Gus: Why would I do that?
Malvo: *Cause some roads you shouldn't go down*

At 2: 06

- (2) Gus: Could you please step out of your car?
Malvo: *How old is your kid?*

At 2:36

- (3) Malvo: You're alive [. . .] *because you chose to walk into the light, instead of into the darkness*

Part 3: Embracing the social

It is now time to go back to 1996 and watch a clip from Fargo, the movie. This is a necessary step for at least two reasons. First, it would be somewhat unsatisfying to analyze Malvo's genius without knowing its cultural and artistic roots. Second, while there is a fair amount of overlapping between the Movie and the Series, the two productions are actually quite different in a lot of respects. This also includes the accents, social meanings, indexicality, and all the relevant sociolinguistic baggage that we discussed in class. For this reason, let us focus now on two clips from the movie. Before anything else, watch the clips.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_ux_5CcleM

Background: The two cops are investigating a triple murder that happened the previous night, where a police officer is found dead along with two other passengers of a different car.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vjB3wiZKAA>

Background: As part of the same investigation, the cop is talking to a potential witness who claims to have seen the suspect in the area

3.1 Variation: a first pass

List 5 linguistic features from the clips that bear a 1st order indexical relationship to the state of Minnesota, or the Upper Midwest in general. Of these features, 2 must be non-phonological (i.e., either syntactic or lexical). They do not need to come from the same character [4 points each]

3.2 Going down the indexicality chain

1. Looking at the two clips, what are some of the stereotypical traits/qualities of these people that are made salient in the dialogues? List and discuss three. They can range from typical activities, to ways of behaving, to what these people are doing, to topics of conversation that these people seem to like to talk about. [10 points]
2. For any of them, make a hypothesis about how the mapping between these qualities and the linguistic features is mediated via the first order indexical relation "Upper Minnesota". [10 points]
3. How do the patterns of language use of these people contribute to give life to these stereotypes and qualities? In particular, do you see - or can you think of - any iconic relationship between the linguistic features listed above and such qualities/attributes? For various examples of iconicity at work in sociolinguistics, refer back to the slides from class. [10 points]

3.3 Extra credit

We talked a lot about the difference between a variationist and a third-wave approach to sociolinguistics. And while we talked about how people in the latter field criticized the former approach, we didn't say much about how people in the variationist camp could be skeptical about the third wave approach and the notion of social meaning in general. Could you think of any possible criticisms of this kind? In other words, if you were a hardcore variationist, what aspects of the third wave approach would you criticize? Discuss at least two, and make sure to motivate your answer. [20 points]

Teaching Materials: Sample Responses from Students

I include below a sample of three responses to the first question of the in-class final exam assigned in Introduction to Linguistics. The first question simply asked to discuss one aspect of linguistics that the student found most interesting, and in which they would be interested in pursuing further coursework. I thought of this question as an opportunity of students to provide feedback and reflect on how this class impacted their education. I also conceived of the question as a way to indirectly gauge the amount of interest and curiosity that I managed to instill about the different parts of the class, as well as about linguistics in general. While variation is to be expected in this kind of responses, I was extremely pleased to see that students' responses covered pretty much any topic that we dealt with in class, suggesting that I managed to make at least some students engaged with every area covered in the course. Below are three sample responses (I apologize for the poor quality of the image. Unfortunately, given that the exam was handwritten, it was not possible to produce a more graphically pleasant output).

1 The basics

1. If you were to take another linguistics class in your life, *only one*, what area(s) of linguistics would this class be on and what phenomena would you like to investigate? Why? Motivate your answer. (10 points)

I would like to study syntax because I find it fascinating to see how words put together can convey such a wide variety of meaning. Moreover, I like how the absence of words can convey meaning as it happens in extraction without RPs. I really enjoyed looking into verb mood usage in other languages and Chomskian grammar. I think that through syntax and comparative grammars we can make sense of what makes languages universal despite being so different!

Interesting!
Lots of work to do! 😊

I am very interested in both phonology and morphology; I think it is so fascinating all the different sounds speakers can produce and constrict to a language, but more so, I am intrigued by the concept of morphemes as well and how they can be repurposed. I would love to study an old, well-documented language (Latin, perhaps) in which I can investigate how morphemes have been repurposed, or discuss the purpose of some

I would take a class on pragmatics and I would like to investigate the way in which assumptions about ~~com~~ the speech of others (like those made with Grice's maxims) affect communication ~~with~~ in various settings (formal vs. casual, different cultures, etc.) I found pragmatics very interesting since ~~being~~ systematizing and characterizing communication beyond what is literally said is a complicated puzzle that I'd like to know more about. *-1/2!*