

Projects - Overview

Linguistics 220 "Language and Society"

Spring 2003 - Northwestern University

Proposal

Meet with your group members as soon as possible and discuss and decide on the following questions.

"What linguistic feature will you investigate?" Identify clearly the linguistic structural feature that you intend to investigate in your study. Feel free to build on features that we've talked about in class that you can apply to a different social group. For example, you could investigate the use of vowel-backing (i.e., like the *burnouts* in Eckert's study) among Northwestern University employees (i.e., such high status employees as faculty compared to such low-status employees as environmental services).

"What is the community that you will investigate?" Identify the speech community that you are investigating. Also, decide how many subjects from that community you will elicit data from and how you will make contact with those people.

"How will you elicit data from the subjects?" Identify the kind of elicitation instrument you will use: interview (personal or group), evaluative reactions via matched-guise test, etc. Decide what will be the content of the elicitation instruments (i.e., what questions will be asked, or what will be the text and guises for a matched-guise test).

The kind of elicitation instrument you choose will, to a great extent, determine the number of subjects you use. Giving personal interviews and analyzing the recordings afterward can take *a lot* of time. This may limit you to a total of eight subjects (2 per group member). On the other hand, with evaluative reaction tests, preparing the test will take a lot of time, but you can give the test to 20-30 subjects at one time with ease.

"What is your hypothesis?" Identify what you predict the relationship is between the social variable your group is studying and the linguistic structural feature you've chosen. Consider the kind of results you expect as well problems you might face obtaining those results.

Each project group should prepare an informal proposal which minimally answers these questions. These proposals are due by **Thursday, May 1st**. This is not a formal document, but should give me an idea of what you're planning to do so that I can give you some feedback and direction, if necessary.

Data collection

As soon as your proposal is "approved", you should begin collecting data. Make sure that everyone is doing their fair share of this process. You should finish gathering data by mid-May.

Data analysis

Each member should analyze the data they've collected before the whole group collates their results for a full analysis. You should meet once more to discuss what you think the results say about your hypothesis. Does it support it? Why or why not?

Write the paper

The last part of the process should be done individually. You should write your own paper based on the work you've done as a group. The paper should have the following basic structure, and minimally answer the indicated questions.

Background What is the relevant background to this particular study? How does it relate to any previous sociolinguistic studies you've read or heard about in class? Why are you studying this feature? What is your hypothesis?

Methods What was your investigative procedure? Who were your subjects? How did you elicit information from them?

Results What were the actual results of the investigation in quantitative and/or qualitative terms. Were there any problems with the investigation?

Discussion Was the hypothesis confirmed? Why or why not? What else do the results show? What kind of sociolinguistic conclusions can you draw from these results? What other implications are there? What further investigations might be performed to further confirm the hypothesis or otherwise further academic understanding of this sociolinguistic phenomenon?

The paper should be written in an academic style and should include a list of references (unless no outside works are referenced). However, I am not partial to any particular style standard (MLA, Chicago, etc.) as long as it is consistent. Finally, you may feel free to use first-person where you feel natural doing so. More important to me, however, is that the paper should be clearly organized and all major points should be made *explicit* and should be *logically supported*.

The paper should be double-spaced in 12-point type. As far as the length of the paper is concerned, I promise that I will read the first ten pages of every paper. That is a sufficient length to cover all of the sections required above. You may write a shorter paper, but a much shorter paper will be unlikely to be complete. You may also write a longer paper, but the quality of the first ten pages will persuade me whether or not or should read on.

The final paper is due at the beginning of class on **Thursday, May 29th**. Electronic submissions are also acceptable. If you must turn in your paper to my mailbox at Linguistics, have the Departmental assistant attach a time-stamp to it.