

LING 490 — Research Methods in Linguistics

Fall 2013

W 1:30–3:20

Dow Hall, Room 321

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The first goal of this course is to train you to do research in linguistics, and facilitate the process of writing your senior essay. This means that your main tasks will be to take the necessary steps that will lead you to produce your own piece of research, which overall include

1. identifying a research area,
2. identifying a research topic within this area, and an advisor,
3. acquiring the background knowledge you need,
4. formulating a research question,
5. formulating a hypothesis,
6. testing your hypothesis,
7. examining and evaluating the results.

The second goal of this course is to help you develop professional skills that are useful for your future, such as writing abstracts, research statements and proposals more generally.

Course Requirements

1. Attend class, and participate. I expect active participation from all members of the class, both discussing your own work and giving feedback to others.
2. Work on your research topic, following all the steps and handing in the assigned work on time.

Grades will be determined according to the following percentages:

written work 80%
participation 20%

Provisional Course Outline

1. Introduction (August 28th).
 2. The structure of a research paper (Sept. 4th).
 3. Presenting oneself and one's interests (Sept. 11th).
 4. Linguistics and its sub-fields: goals and methodologies (Sept. 18rd).
 5. The structure of an abstract (September 25th).
 6. Individual research topics: finding relevant references. Meeting with a librarian? (October 2nd).
 7. Individual research topics: hypotheses in broad strokes (October 9th, 16th).
 8. Individual research topics: testable hypotheses (October 30th)
 9. Applying for graduate school, internships or jobs. (November 6th)
 10. Writing an abstract of your own work (November 13th)
 11. Senior essays: outline and plan of work. (November 20th and December 4th)
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Assignments (tentative)

1. Assignment 1: Read (at least) two senior essays and report on them in writing (1-2 pages per report). Make sure to include (a) an introductory paragraph stating the area of research and the research question(s) addressed, (b) a description of the methodology used, (c) the hypothesis put forth by the author, (d) a description of the major findings/results/conclusions reached, and, if possible (e) a brief evaluation of the methodology and findings. Due Wednesday, September 4th.
2. Assignment 2: (a) Study the web site of at least six Linguistics Departments that offer a PhD in linguistics; (b) write a statement about your research interests (aka personal statement, or statement of purpose), as if you were applying to one of those departments. Even if you don't plan on going on with school, writing a statement will be good practice. Suggested length: 2 pages. Due Wednesday, September 11th.
3. Assignment 3: By now, everyone will probably have chosen an area of research (though not necessarily a topic); write two pages in which you (a) describe the object of investigation of the sub-field you chose, (b) mention some case studies, (c) discuss the kind of methodology used, and (c) say why this is important to linguistics and to human knowledge more broadly. Due Wednesday, September 18th.
4. Assignment 4: Choose a journal article or book chapter about a topic related to the area in which you plan to write your senior essay. (It should be a piece of original research, not a survey article or textbook chapter.) Read the article thoroughly, then pretend that you are the author of the research and are submitting an abstract to a conference: write a 500 words abstract that presents the research. Make sure that you follow the LSA's guidelines for abstract writing, and that you provide full bibliographical details for the article. Due Wednesday, September 25th.

5. Assignment 5: (a) Choose a research topic. (b) Make a written list of references relevant to your topic (5-10 entries), with full bibliographical details. (c) Write a brief review of at least two of the articles you have chosen. Due Wednesday, October 2nd.

Notes:

(1) For your references, please follow the style given in the "Unified style sheet for linguistics", which you can find at <<http://linguistlist.org/pubs/tocs/JournalUnifiedStyleSheet2007.pdf>>

(2) The review of the two articles should be carefully written and should contain (i) an introductory paragraph that outlines the main issues discussed in the paper; (ii) a clear statement of the main linguistic intuition that underlies the proposal; (iii) a discussion of the kind of evidence brought in support of the proposal; (iv) a concluding paragraph with a brief summary and (possibly) an evaluation (only if you feel like you can evaluate the paper).

6. Assignment 6: Write at least 1.5 pages on the topic of your senior essay. Your plan should include the following (not necessarily in this order):

- The faculty member(s) you'll be working with.
- A description of the puzzle you plan to investigate.
- How you will investigate the topic. (What methodology will you use? What equipment or resources, if relevant? Will you need IRB approval?)
- Why you chose that topic (that is, why is this question interesting?)
- Potential problems you see in the essay topic.
- If you want to do an experiment, some information about the protocol.

Due Wednesday, October 9th.

7. Assignment 7: (a) Read some of the literature on the topic that you selected, and identify "families of approaches" to the puzzle you're investigating; weigh the pro's and con's of each one and make up your mind on which seems best to you. (b) Write a report that outlines these different approaches to your topic and contains an overall evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses. Due Wednesday, October 16th.

8. Assignment 8: Write 2 pages in which you: (a) Describe the question you plan to investigate, using the relevant data to illustrate it (b) Formulate a hypothesis for the question you have chosen to investigate, and state it as precisely as possible. (c) State the predictions that your hypothesis makes as precisely as possible. Due Wednesday, October 30th.

9. Assignment 9: Choose one of the following options:

- (a) If you're preparing a personal statement (because you're applying to graduate school, or for a job), make that your assignment for this week (i.e., write a statement about your interests, career goals, why you would like to enter a graduate program or get the job for which you're applying).
- (b) Otherwise, choose two articles relevant for your senior essay and write a review for each of them.

Due Wednesday, November 6th.

10. Assignment 10: Write an abstract about your research topic, following the guidelines provided by the LSA. Due Wednesday, November 13th.

11. Assignment 11: Write a detailed outline of your senior essay, indicating the contents of each section, stating your research questions and your hypothesis, describing the work still to be done; include a detailed bibliography. Due Wednesday, November 20th.
 12. Assignment 12: Work on the outline of your senior essay, incorporating the feedback you received. Due Wednesday, December 4th.
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Schedule for the senior essay:

- October 9th: settle on advisor(s) and topic
- December 4th: detailed outline
- March 26th: First full written draft due to your advisor(s)
- April 16th: Final draft due (one copy for your advisor(s))
- April 23rd: one electronic copy and one bound copy due to the Linguistics Department
- April 23rd: dinner with all advisors