FIELD PROJECT REPORT GUIDELINES

General comments: Following are a few hints about how to improve your chances of a good grade on your field project report. These are by no means exclusive and following them will not *guarantee* you a good grade. Paying careful attention to them, however, will reduce the likelihood of your paper being flawed by serious omissions.

The field project report you write in this class is primarily an educational exercise and need not constitute a serious or significant contribution to the academic literature on your topic. You are not expected to produce something worthy of publication, in terms of either content (novelty and analytical sophistication) or form (polish). Nevertheless, you should treat your report as a rehearsal for writing the kind of paper that *could* be submitted to a journal: an exercise in the skills that you would rely on if you *were* to go on in academic work. In other words, do not write your paper as though it were simply a homework assignment and your professor the only audience. I already know about your project and share some of your implicit assumptions, but your (imaginary) target audience does not, so write in an objective and explicit manner.

In matters of form, I do not expect you to conform to any particular set of style parameters, but I do expect something neat and well-written, reflecting a respect for both your reader and your own work. It hardly needs to be said that term papers should be free of typos and other errors (orthographic and grammatical), or that they should employ such standard elements of formatting as page numbers and section headings.

As for length, your paper should probably comprise 15-20 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font), but this is only a general guideline, indicating what is expected. You may wish to expand your discussion beyond this, though you should certainly not exceed 30 pages. If you are approaching that limit, you should consider ways to condense your discussion or data-presentation. Appendices are not included in the determination of length. Materials that are not central to the main discussion (raw data, demographic information on subjects, questionnaires, etc.) can be placed in appendices, with the caveat that appendices are usually not read unless the reader is specifically directed to read them.

In writing your report, the following scheme is recommended:

Introduction (probably 2-3 pages): your paper should begin with a clear and concise statement of what you're reporting on; that is, *what* you've studied and *why*.

The *what* involves an explicit statement of your research question(s) or hypothesis and of the variables you looked at -- dependent and independent -- such that a reader not familiar with your work, or even with the language or community you studied, can understand immediately what your paper is about. What are you trying to find out? This includes situating your dependent variables linguistically, if applicable: how are they "structurally embedded" in the rest of the linguistic system?

The *why* involves explaining why your reader should be interested in what you're going to say: what is the larger significance of your study; what is the "problem" you are going to address? What will your study tell us about human language in general, and about dialect variation in particular? Answering these questions may require some creative thinking, but this is worth doing, since broad significance makes your paper more interesting to both you and your reader. This discussion should be solidly rooted in references to appropriate parts of the linguistic and dialectological literature: what is already known about your topic; what is not known; what are the precedents for your study; what is the theoretical background of your topic? Your references should include both relevant parts of the literature we have read in class and sources that you have discovered on your own topic (insofar as these exist).

Method (probably 2-3 pages): explain clearly how you went about gathering and analyzing your data. This must be done in such a way that a reader who wished to test your findings by replicating your research would know exactly how to go about it. Standard procedures, like recording interviews, manipulating data in a spreadsheet, or carrying out statistical tests, can often be identified simply by name

or a brief description, but procedures that you developed for your particular study must be fully explained. In particular, your sampling and elicitation methods should described in detail (who provided the data and how were they gathered), along with any decisions you made about what to concentrate on and what to ignore, how to group people or data together, or how to look for patterns in the data. It is sometimes useful to include experimental materials or full details of your sample in an appendix, if you think that the reader may benefit from being able to refer to them.

Results (probably 2-4 pages): present the reader with all of the data that will be referred to in the ensuing discussion. The results you present should bear directly on the research question(s) identified in your introduction. You should neither present superfluous data that will not be discussed, nor discuss data that have not been presented. Put some thought into determining the most effective way to present your data, combining the virtues of accuracy, clarity and concision. Your key results should be neatly summarized in appropriate tables, graphs or maps that are consecutively numbered and explicitly referred to and discussed in the text. All such figures should be clearly labeled so that the reader can understand immediately what they show. Clarity is often advanced by including a brief explanatory caption under the figure; ideally, someone skimming through your paper should be able to understand its main points by glancing at the figures without reading the text. Tables of data on individual subjects should normally be confined to the appendix, where they can serve to clarify doubtful generalizations or conclusions when necessary; the body of the report should contain only summary tables that show the aggregate patterns you discuss.

Analysis/discussion (probably at least 4-5 pages): this is the heart of your paper, the section in which you communicate (in prose) the results of your study to the reader. There are several ways to organize this section, but a standard and effective approach is to plan the discussion around the tables and graphs that display your results. Some people prefer to integrate results and analysis, presenting each major result and discussing it in turn. Others prefer to present all of the tables and graphs together in a section labeled "results", and then refer to them one by one as they come up for discussion in a separate section called "analysis". The latter approach is sometimes typographically easier. The basic issue here is maintaining a clear separation between the objective reporting of facts ("results") and the more subjective function of analysis and interpretation (what you think the results mean).

Regardless of how you organize this section, the key thing is to direct your reader's attention to each set of data in turn, explaining and interpreting the patterns you observe, along with any statistical analyses you have performed, and using the data to answer the questions posed in your introduction. The reader should always be able to confirm what you are saying by referring to your results. Once you have identified the basic patterns in your data, your discussion should turn to broader questions: how do your results compare to those of previous studies; how can they be accounted for; what do they tell us about the community you studied or about nature of dialect variation or human language?

Conclusion(s) (probably 1-2 pages): wrap up your report with a summary of the questions you set out to answer and the answers you found. Provide a critical assessment of your study, identifying any problems you encountered and suggesting alternative approaches. Propose some directions for future research, inspired by your experience.

Notes: you may wish to use either footnotes or endnotes in order to prevent tangential information from cluttering your text and distracting the reader from your main discussion. The use and format of notes is up to you.

References: give accurate and explicit references to all of the literature you cite in your paper. The particular format you choose is up to you (there are many; look at the end of any recent linguistics article or book for a model), but the essential information (author, date, title, journal name, publisher, page(s), etc.) should be present, alphabetized by author's last name.