Statement of Purpose: Stanford

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1 Personal

I am looking to study formal-computational semantics and pragmatics. I have a nice base in descriptive, typological-functional theories from study under Stephanie Robin Quizar and Lyle Campbell, as well as in minimalist syntax from Aniko Csirmaz and Ed Rubin. Now I want to study more formal techniques. One of my main interests is Evidentiality. This came from working with Tukanoan languages, and presently I am looking into how languages without grammatical evidentials may possibly encode evidential (or epistemic modal) interpretations. I am also interested in building ontologies and formal models of context for evidential reasoning, presupposition, and implicature.

At first I was not going to apply to Stanford Linguistics, even though I have always wanted to get my PhD here. I was not sure that my interests in pragmatics and semantics aligned well with enough of the faculty's interests. However, given new additions to the department, I see that my interests are broadly represented in the linguistics faculty and I know I could be a productive member of the community.

1.1 GRE Scores

Unfortunately, my 4 year old GRE scores do not accurately reflect my ability. I know why the scores are low and am correcting this by re-taking the GRE. However, since I only recently decided to apply to Stanford (as of November 16), my new scores will not be submitted in time. (That is, the deadline of December 8 is much earlier than the other schools I am applying to and I don't re-take the GRE until December 10). In effect, and specifically regarding the low quantitative score, I was naive about preparing for the exam and thought that because I was doing active research and writing, as well as studying mathematical logic and abstract algebra on my own, I would be fine without studying for the actual test. I am not proud of my naiveté and will convince you that the GRE scores that have been submitted do not reflect my actual ability.

2 Research

I am interested in applying various linguistic theories to solve real-world problems in scientific and industry related domains. I enjoy finding ways to use ideas from mathematical logic, computability theory, and abstract algebra to build rigorous models for natural languages. Presently I am focusing my energy on basic skills needed for computational linguists. This includes (i) basic command line usage (having recently switched to a Linux environment), (ii) natural language processing (including languages such as Python, Lisp, Prolog), and (iii) statistics and probablility. These are life-long goals and I have no pretention to mastery in a few short months.

The following subsections list current and future research projects I would like to continue in my doctoral studies.

2.1 Current Projects: 2008–2009

(1) *English Corpus of Evidentiality Data* (goal of 1 million sentences/clauses; presently at about .02% of goal).

(2) *Evidentiality and the Human Mind: Language, Information, and Human Discourse* (`Project under review for funding by the NEH Summer Stipend 2010`).

(3) *Some Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics of Evidentiality in English.* Ms., 29 pgs: version 1.3.

(4) *Recursion for Computation's Sake.* Ms., 24 pgs: version 1.

(5) *Ambiguous Merge, Symmetry, and Group Theory*. Ms., 27 pgs: version 2.

   a. Revision in progress for future squib submission. *A Note on Ideal Structure for a Hypothetical Operation.* 9 pgs: version 1.

2.2 Future Project Interests: Things that have been on my mind

(6) Computing Fixed Phrases and Idioms by Named Entity Recognition and Normalization (related to work I did as a linguist intern at Attensity Corporation).

(7) Statistical Patterns for Pragmatic Structures in English Evidentiality.

(8) Formalizing Context.

(9) Ontology and Knowledge Representation for Evidential Reasoning.

I am also considering studying a language with a large web presence: starting Mandarin, or continuing German or Spanish.