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April 10,
2015
ANTH 5401

Journal 7

This field methods class completes my 30 credits of required coursework in the linguistics major, and I really couldn't think of a better way to do it. Wrestling with Arapesh for the entire semester has been among the most demanding, and also most valuable, academic exercises I've ever undertaken.

Problem sets I'd encountered in linguistics courses before this class were wonderful but limited in a variety of ways. The amount of data is much smaller, usually with no more than ~30 data points in my experience. Further, problem sets are usually contrived. They are carefully curated and often simplified to fit the author's pedagogical intent for the problem set, e.g. to demonstrate the limits of concatenative morphology as a model, or to demonstrate tone's capacity to differentiate lexemes.

Obviously smaller problems are modular and have earned their place as the primary way to give students hands-on experience with linguistic phenomena. But they left a few places unexplored that I'm really glad this class took me to. For starters, in just my own notebook I collected over 1000 glossed lines. Having to herd and keep track of all these words was a challenge in itself. Further, I'd never worked so freely across levels of analysis, all the way from phonetics to pragmatics. It was very rewarding to be investigating all at once. I know other instructors tend to structure the course differently, working from the ground (phonology) up, but I think the all-at-once approach has some merits as well: if something semantic is fresh on your mind, you don't want to wait until the end of the semester when the idea is stale.

This is all to say that I'm very glad this was part of my experience as a major, and that I consider it among the two most important classes I've taken for it. In my analysis I think I drew from every other linguistics class I'd taken for grammatical concepts, so it was a perfect way to wrap up the major.

Now some more thoughts on more specific aspects of the class. It was such a valuable experience to interact with Jacob. It was such a head trip when we tried to elicit forms and he responded—obviously—as if he were himself rather than the person asking for the form. (We must have had him say *nə* for *eik* a hundred times.) It was a very real, mildly frustrating reminder that we're so abstract in the way we use and reason about language. I found myself often thinking about that and his refusal to say that the (hypothetical!) dog would be staying tomorrow because he “doesn't know”. I was sharing our experiences with some people who had taken field methods the previous semester with a consultant from the Comm school, and they seemed envious of the experience, for in some respects we and Jacob were truly a world apart.

One thing I noted in my grammar but I'll repeat here is that I had trouble deciding what I thought about the way we would ask Jacob to repeat some things. For example, think of when we heard *worubaigwi nimbagw* as only *worubaigwi nimbau*. What was our reaction in this case of apparent “lack of concord”, or whatever you want to call it? It was to ask him again what he said and strain to hear a different form, *nimbagw*. That time it turned out to be there, and the data turned out to be prettier than we had first heard it, but I worry about what this does to the data. It could lead us to collecting forms that are not what people actually say. Think of a Martian field linguist asking an English speaker to repeat “gonna” enough times until he got “going to”. The Martian would probably squee with delight at the reduction of arbitrariness in the grammar, but in some senses “gonna” is what we really, actually want. I don't know where I'm going with this,

but I think I'm trying to say we were at least slightly imposing a structure on our data sometimes. (Not that that's ever entirely avoidable, I suppose.)

Some more thoughts on the class. As I already noted in my last journal I sometimes found it frustrating to not have a “PI-for-a-day” for each class. The point that some PI's would be weak leads (not because of lack of ability—just perhaps a lack of experience, as some people in the course had only had one or two linguistics classes) is a strong one. Why not, then, maybe a pair of PI's for the day (decided on by the instructor according to her intuition for how strong the two would be—one strong, one less so)? We did similar pairings for database entry, and maybe it would be nice to give some structure to class. Although as I write I'm thinking to myself: it would be strange to have classes where nobody could ask a question except the PI's. At the same time, we run into the problem that at least I had (I don't know if anyone else did) with feeling disoriented at the multiple directions questions were headed in.

I could go on, but I think I've covered the major parts.

Class Involvement

I will break down my class involvement by hierarchical bullet points with hours spent on each listed.

- Data Entry
 - Investigating existing software for data entry
 - Searching for existing solutions (**2hr**)
 - Learning, setting up, and probing the Online Linguistics Database program (**12hr**)
 - Trying to use Google docs for data entry
 - Making the IPA buttons that are now on the course website (**4hr**)
 - Making a computer program to take forms and put them neatly in Google docs (**5hr**)
 - (We didn't end up using this)
 - Developing scripts for automating A/V manipulation, incl. downsampling wav's to mp3's and amplifying the audio, as well as downsampling video to make it smaller (**8hr**)
 - (You said it'd be great to use this at the beginning, so I finished developing it, but the A/V collectors found their own ways of accomplishing the same tasks and I didn't want to impose my tool on them if they didn't want to use it.)
- In Class
 - Recording forms and posting pictures of the chalkboard (1 session)
- To Be Completed
 - Develop a “readily deployable” collaboration tool solution for future offerings of field methods (??hr)
 - Maybe you, me, and Mark should all talk about this