

LIN 405 - Writing in Linguistics

Summer 2021 - Scott Nelson

Pseudo-linguistic articles

- Australian English sounds the way it does because the forefathers got drunk together
- Language makes us different than other animals
- “Differences of Human Languages Driven by Climate and Environment”

Who is it by?

- In general ideas are more important than authors, but...
 - when it comes to intricate scholarly subjects, some people are more well studied than others
- In general people seem to consider themselves experts on language
- The three articles mentioned were written by non-linguist academics and a journalist
- Lack of linguistic credentials is not an automatic disqualification, but you should have some skepticism when reading the piece

Conflating concepts and misrepresenting theories

- Does the author recognize that language is more than words + sounds?
- Do they recognize spelling is not the same thing as language?
- Are they fair to opposing views or do they trivialize theories to make their point?
- In general do they have a poor grasp of what it is that linguists care about?

Not engaging with linguistic data

- Do they have any data?
- If they do have data is it based on personal beliefs/anecdotes?
- Do they interpret the data in a believable way?

Open-Access

Article Processing Charge

- It is often the case that journals will allow your article to be open-access only after you pay an article processing charge (APC)
- Cognition had an APC of \$2150
 - It looks like it has been raised to \$3290
- The entire editorial board of Lingua quite because Elsevier would not lower APC
 - Formed open-access journal Glossa
 - Second journal Glossa: Pyscholinguistics started within the last year
- Hybrid journals are "double dipping" with APC + Subscriptions

Business first

- Journals typically do not pay reviewers
 - Free labor
- Profit margins are higher than Facebook and the Industrial & Commercial Bank of China
- Universities pay millions of dollars for subscriptions to these journals

Sci-hub

Hosting scientific papers

- Sci-hub hosts 50 million+ academic papers
- It is illegal
- Sci-hub avoids legal action by switching domain locations
- Largely supplemented by password sharing
 - "I cannot confirm the exact source of the credentials," [Elbakyan] told Science, "but can confirm that I did not send any phishing emails myself."
- Over 3 million unique IP addresses downloaded 28 million unique documents in a six month period in 2015-2016

Problem with current academic paywall

- Paywalls keep publicly funded research out of the public's reach.
- While publishers own the copyrights, they didn't create the content. Researchers typically do not receive any royalties from the money their work generates.
- This model only exists because academic journals confer prestige on authors. Authors willingly give up rights to their own research because they believe it will help their careers.

Aaron Schwartz

- Downloaded 450,000 JSTOR articles using MIT log in information
- He returned all of the downloaded articles but still ended up in a long court battle

Student Questions

- Many people who write about language and linguistics have majors in other fields. Therefore, why is it allowed for them to write on a topic they have not studied in their academic career besides the fact that "they think they know."?
- Why do people so often write about things they are not knowledgeable in such as language?
- Why is it exactly that so many people with no linguistic qualifications feel that it's appropriate for them to attempt to write (pseudo) academically on linguistic topics?
- Isn't pseudo-linguistics fine if the target audience are people who have no actual interest in linguistics and just want a quick read about Australian jargon?

- I understand why this woman did what she did, but I still am confused on how it is illegal but still up. Is it because there is a big percentage of people who use SciHub and it would be too difficult to take down?
- What do you feel are the broader societal implications of reputable and reliable information being kept behind exorbitant paywalls? Do you have an opinion on the ethics of what Elbakyan has done?

- Pereltsvaig discusses not engaging with linguistic data or misusing data as a sign of pseudo-linguistic rubbish. But to what extent is a lack of provided data for a proposal considered pseudo-linguistic? For example, one famously contested claim made by Everett is that Piraha does not exhibit recursion. Many linguists argue this by saying that Everett did not document proper or enough examples to make this claim. Would it be fair to call claims like this pseudo-linguistic?
- Is there a well-defined line between being pseudo-linguistic and speculative? Is it alright to publish a paper that speculates on what is believed to be correct or is this frowned upon by academics similarly to pseudo-linguistic papers?

- With all the trouble of psuedo-ling (like the articles mentioned, and people teaching their dogs to "talk"), would a good partial solution be more science communicators in the linguistics field to explain linguistics concepts to the mainstream from an actual linguistics background?
- I think its important to draw a distinction between those who purposely feign knowledge of linguistics and those who are just poorly informed. Regardless, neither have business bieng in the mainstream media and it makes me curious what the vetting process is like for this (I assume little to none)?

Swift Poll

New sources

- Each person will tell us about one new source they found in detail as well as the cost of all three sources if they had to pay full price for them.
- Questions about source:
 1. How did you find the source (Google Scholar, LingBuzz, etc...)
 2. Why did you choose this as a potential source for your paper?
 3. What was the hardest part for you in finding new sources?
 4. Did you acquire a copy of the actual source?
 5. Any other thoughts