

Research Project
Brainstorm
Ling 154
Due Th 10/15

Overview

This class requires a research project in which you conduct original research on an aspect of language, identity, or society that interests you. This paper should be at least 10 double-spaced pages and cover your topic thoroughly. Therefore it is vital that your topic is sufficiently narrow as to be completed over the next 10 weeks and still be of interest.

Brainstorming session

On the due date, you should submit a no more than one page report describing two to three topics you are considering. You should formulate a testable hypothesis/research question for each and list the pros and cons you foresee in addressing them. Fully explain your hypothesis and say what you expect to find. The goal of this assignment is to force you to get thinking about the final paper as early as possible and allow me to give you feedback and guide the process.

Choosing a topic and some suggestions

The topic should interest you. Ideally, it will also be related to your academic strengths (e.g. you may not want to address language policy in China if you don't know any Chinese). Your topic should have some sort of testable hypothesis or exploratory/descriptive goal. Below are some suggestions I have for interesting paper topics. These are far from well-formed, some are too broad or are simple sketches. Also: *do not limit yourselves to these*, feel free to branch out.

- The Californian rising intonation pattern in statements: who does it and when?
- Abbreviating polysyllabic words (and their reduplication; AKA the “cray-cray” thing): what are the structural constraints on it?
- Online / texting abbreviations and lingo: how has it affected other types of writing? Who uses it and how much?
- Relatedly: what about lolcats/133+/etc.? Have they made a deeper impact? Are there consistent internal rules?
- Spanish vs. English among the Hispanic community: linguistic preferences and how that relates to one's identity as an American/Hispanic/Californian/etc.
- Accurately reproducing borrowed Spanish terms and place names: how do different groups approach the nativization of these foreign place names? How do Caucasian and Hispanic communities view the phenomenon?
- It has been argued in the popular press that “swear” words and other taboo language is increasingly less taboo. Is this true? Are we losing all taboos or are we taboo-izing new terms to replace them?
- Description of aspects of some under- or non-described dialect or identity based group, e.g. the speech of youths in Santa Clara, the lingo and speech patterns of surfers, etc.
- The use of speech styles by politicians: Obama and the tradition of black preachers, Sarah Palin and her use of a non-standard accent...