

Teaching Statement

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My experience teaching linguistics has involved serving as a teaching assistant (TA) for five undergraduate courses here at UC Santa Cruz—Syntax 1 (twice), Semantics 1, Syntax 2, and Syntactic Structures—and serving as the primary instructor for a fifth undergraduate course: Structure of Spanish. I have found all six experiences extremely rewarding, enjoyable, and formative.

My approach to teaching has been deeply influenced by a method characteristic of the UCSC Linguistics Department, and in particular of the syntax courses we offer. UCSC syntax classes are student-driven in a strong sense, although of course the direction provided by the instructor and TAs is indispensable. In Syntax 1, for example, there is no textbook. Instead, the learning proceeds, and descriptive and theoretical progress is made, as follows: **1)** The students receive a homework assignment consisting of one or more sets of data they must account for, using whatever theoretical tools they already have or can devise on their own. Collaboration is strongly encouraged, but every student must write up every homework assignment independently. **2)** In class, various groups' solutions are collectively discussed and compared, and their descriptive and explanatory success is assessed. The outcome is that a solution is tentatively agreed upon and then serves as the basis for further investigations. The cycle begins anew with the next assignment. This method thus emphasizes collaboration, constant skeptical review of assumptions, the search for patterns in complex bodies of observations, and the need for clear and careful argumentation and exposition.

None of this is to suggest that I oppose more traditional methods (the use of textbooks, for example); I certainly do not. For some classes, they are essential. But what I find creative, exciting, and compelling about the “Santa Cruz syntax” method—which can, of course, be adapted to courses in other subfields as well—is that the students are *of necessity* highly involved, rather than passively consuming information: they are the creators and drivers of the theory (although the instructors guide their progress and occasionally introduce theoretical concepts themselves). This method is not appropriate for all classes—it does not, for example, seem usable in a large introductory class—but it is effective in imparting skills of analysis, critique, and exposition, and it draws able young people into the discipline. It is for these reasons that I am eager to use it again, adapted in the necessary ways to new contexts, in those classes in which it is appropriate (e.g., small to medium-sized classes in syntax, morphology, and perhaps semantics, as well as more thematically targeted courses such as Structure of Spanish, Structure of Latin, or Structure of Ancient Greek).

I am also eager, however, to teach undergraduate and/or graduate courses structured around readings: the ability to read critically, sympathetically, and efficiently is, after all, central to what we do as linguists.

In addition to teaching “theoretical” (though empirically based) courses such as syntax, morphology, and so on, I would also be highly interested in teaching field methods—a class in which the students and I would work with one or more native speakers of a language (ideally, but not necessarily, a less-studied one) to elucidate aspects of its grammar. In such a class, I would bring to bear on our task the practical hands-on experience I have as a fieldworker. This experience derives largely from the fieldwork I have done on P’urhepecha, a language isolate, in Michoacán, Mexico, which involved elicitation and discussion (and explicit metalinguistic reflection) with a few dozen native speakers, in small group sessions, during portions of the summers of 2014, 2015, and 2016—primarily on the island of Janitzio on Lake Pátzcuaro, but also in other nearby communities where different varieties of the language are spoken. I would also bring to bear on our task what I learned in my own field methods course here at UCSC, taught by Amy Rose Deal (now at Berkeley), for which the consultant was a UCSC undergraduate who is a native speaker of Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec (TdVZ). In that course, not only did the students work in pairs with our consultant to shed light on various aspects of TdVZ grammar and their theoretical implications, but also we discussed such crucial issues as how to make, organize, and store recordings and notes so that they can be eas-

ily consulted later; how interspeaker variation (in judgments and otherwise) should be understood; how we should reason about fieldwork data and how it can be linked up to the theoretical hypotheses being developed and tested; and what it means to do fieldwork in a way that is as ethical, responsible, and just as possible.

I should also mention that there are certain other types of courses that I have not yet taught (or TAed for) but would nonetheless be able to, owing to the solid training I have received in the relevant areas. For example, although I have not yet taught an undergraduate historical linguistics course, I did take an excellent one as an undergraduate at Princeton, with Joshua Katz, and would therefore definitely be able to teach one myself with a standard textbook (e.g., Lyle Campbell's *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*). Similarly, although I have not yet taught on linguistic topics in the context of an interdisciplinary humanities (or social-sciences) course—one incorporating philosophy, literature, history, sociology, and so on—I would certainly be able to do that as well, having taken just such a course as an undergraduate (Princeton's two-semester Humanities Sequence) and benefited from it very greatly indeed.

My approach in all settings is to do my best to foster a classroom atmosphere that is enjoyable and relatively informal, but marked by seriousness of purpose, mutual respect, and a clear commitment to understanding the phenomena and concepts under investigation as deeply as possible. I strongly encourage students to meet with me during office hours or consult me over e-mail if they have questions or would like to solidify their understanding of particular concepts. Finally, I strive to be friendly, open, and available.