Abstract Writing:
How to Convince in a Page

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Overview

Tell you why I am interested in the methodology of our field, especially in abstract writing.

The basic structure of an abstract

How authors play with the basic structure producing interesting variations.

Discuss a variety of strategies used to convince.

I will illustrate throughout the previous three points with successful abstracts from the 2018 LSA covering the spectrum of subfields of Linguistics.
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Preamble

When I started my graduate studies in Linguistics, I hadn't had a single course in the field, making it difficult to argue and present ideas, let alone do my HW.

One of my professors pointed me to two dissertations Tanya Reinhardt's and David Perlmutter's, and told me that I could learn linguistic argumentation by reading these works, and watching how arguments are built.

Since then, I have taken a lot of interest in argumentation and presentation of ideas, especially because I think a lot of good ideas come and go, without having the effects they could have had, because they were poorly argued.
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And I'm thoroughly convinced that good argumentation is a learnt skill, not some innate quality.

The abstract is the first entry of the student into the larger community of linguists (beyond one's educational institution), and is therefore a ticket to the field, if you will.

And I think that if you write a good abstract, you're on your way to writing a good paper.

The ideas I present here are my hypotheses about what makes a good abstract. There's no formula for making your abstract automatically accepted, since there are several reviewers with their own ideas about what makes a good abstract, so please use the ideas here at your own risk.

OK, let's start...
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OK, let’s start...
The basic structure, deceptively trivial

Ask a question
Answer the question
The coherence of an abstract depends on the question-answer complementarity.

How good an abstract is, I think, depends on how interesting and important the question is, and how well the answer fits the question sufficiently for the purpose of an abstract.

Common Errors:
1. Absence of Question/Answer structure: I will work on Phenomenon X in Language/Dialect/Register A. Here's what I have to say about it.
2. Too small of a question. The answer is basically unrelated to the question.

What I would like to help you with is how to rewrite a 1-like abstract into a question/answer abstract.
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How to ask a question?

By *ask a question*, I do not mean that you should literally ask a question with a question mark at the end, even though that is possible, and is a nice way of directly asking the question. Asking a question generates tension, which is diffused by answering the question, and there are various ways of achieving this tension, most of which are indirect.

I will now discuss the fountain of indirect ways of asking a question.
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1. **Question**: There are two Hypotheses, A and B. A predicts data in the world to be like X, whereas B predicts data in the world to be like Y. Pssst: tension has been built.

2. **Answer**: The Evidence is like X, so Hypothesis A is the correct one. Pssst: tension has been diffused.

A/B tension sets us a question about the world, which is answered through data. Do you see how tension is built and released using this method? Do you also see how coherent a discourse is generated by this method?
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Linguistic Explorations in Honor of David M. Perlmutter

Edited by Donna B. Gerdts, John C. Moore and Maria Polinsky

Essays reflecting the influence of the versatile linguist David M. Perlmutter, covering topics from theoretical morphology to sign language phonology.
Subtle Hypothesis A/Hypothesis B

To be clear: Why am I identifying the notions of "asking a question" and "Hyp A/Hyp B" thinking? Because I think implicit in A/B is a question about which is true, and that that is the essence of that discourse.

I've examined 18 abstracts explicitly and come up with three basic ways of asking the question.

But I do believe that these results generalize to many other abstracts, however, I think that a fuller study may reveal other subtle ways of asking the question.
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Agreement Mismatches in Cayuga and Configurationality

**Nutshell:** Comitative arguments in Cayuga exhibit an uncommon agreement pattern. In a sentence such as *John and I left*, the verb exhibits 1.dual agreement; however, the only overt nominal is *John*. This observation has been used as an argument that overt nominals are not directly selected by verbs (Koenig & Michelson 2015, for Oneida, closely related to Cayuga). We present prosodic evidence that such mismatched nominals are clause peripheral as Koenig & Michelson argue, while agreeing nominals are, in fact, clause internal. Coupled with previous research on clause structure in Cayuga (Dyck 2009; Dyck et al. 2014), we argue for a configurational view of Cayuga.

**Background:** Cayuga is traditionally described as discourse-configurational or non-configurational (in the sense of Hale 1983). It exhibits extremely free word order and complex agreement patterns indexing both subject and object. Following Jelinek (1984) all overt nominal are clause-peripheral. An example of mismatched agreement is found in (1). The agreement on the verb (1.dual) reflects the understood subject; however, the overt subject is simply *John*. 
Gender, Power, and Princesses: A qualitative and quantitative study of directive use in children’s movies

The study of the construction of gender in sociolinguistics relies increasingly on the idea of cultural discourses. Kiesling (2005) notes that cultural discourses are “reflected in, and created by... performances, and in widely shared cultural performances such as literature and film.” (2005: 696). However, although third wave sociolinguistic studies have turned their attention to the enacting of gender discourses in interpersonal contexts, there has been little study of language in the cultural artifacts which supposedly help create these gender ideologies. In addition, researchers in other areas such as media studies who have analyzed gender in these contexts have relied mainly on interpretations of character and plot, which, although valuable, overlook the key role language plays in building character interaction. This research project seeks to address these concerns by applying critical discourse analytical methods to the presentation of gender in the Disney Princess and Pixar films. Studies in child development have shown that children use these films in playing with and constructing their gender identities (Baker-Sperry 2007, Coyne et al. 2016). We hope to shed some light on how these vastly popular films contribute to ideologies about gendered language use.

In this paper we turn our attention to the gendered construction of power in Disney and Pixar movies. We do so by examining directives, defined by Searle (1969) as a speech act in which a speaker attempts to get a recipient to carry out or refrain from some action. Directive use has
of the language families sampled.

The second section uses the dataset to evaluate several specific claims which have been made in the literature, especially those involving antipassives and alignment. For example, antipassives have long been associated with ergativity (some argue antipassives should not exist in nominative-accusative languages, e.g. Palmer 1994:197); however, by the criteria used here about 45% of antipassives in the sample are found in non-ergative languages. This includes 36% of active-inactive languages, which have also been claimed to eschew voice operations in general (cf. Dixon 1994:31). As such, it seems the correlation between ergativity and antipassives may be symptomatic of some other more relevant correlation. I make the case that antipassives (and ergativity) are more likely to be present in languages with strictly distinguished transitivity classes for verbs (see relatedly Givón 1984:151-164 on ergativity).

This larger dataset allows linguists to address issues relating to antipassives more thoroughly and
Why a unified theory of language shift is not possible.

Language shift is the major mechanism of language endangerment and loss (LEL) motivating linguists to understand how and why language shift occurs or doesn’t occur, both as a theoretical question, and to aid applied collaborative work for language maintenance and revitalization. The macro variables of language shift are already well understood, e.g., economic pressures to use a non-local language, removal of children from home for schooling, and standard “monoglot” language ideology and concomitant “ideology of contempt” for divergent linguistic practices (Silverstein 1996, Dorian 1998). Even so, we must ask, when is reference to generalized factors explanatory? In addition to generalized factors, Grenoble and Whaley note that “it is at the level of micro-variables where one can account for...differences in the rate, outcome, and reversibility of language-shift” (1998:28) and that understanding micro-variables requires accounts of “social meaning” involving “the attitudes, beliefs, and values of a community” (1998:33).

In this paper we argue that rather than seek a common denominator that predicts when shift will occur, explanatory adequacy in a science of language shift can only be achieved through ethnographic engagement with the particular histories and interpretive practices of linguistic communities in the process of transformation to understand what changing patterns of language use mean for the people in question. Although language shift might be describable as a unified phenomenon from an etic point of
Category 1: Statements of A and B

Complicating categories: **Personae mediate racialized expectations of non-native speech**

Research in speech perception and social psychology has shown that American listeners link certain racialized groups to non-native English speech. Photographs leading listeners to believe that a speaker is Asian, versus White, can hinder comprehension of L1-American English speech (e.g., Rubin 1992) and facilitate processing of L2-accented English (McGowan 2014). Such studies rely on the notion that an Asian face primes expectations of L2-accented English. However, the treatment of “Asian” as a monolithic social category in prior work may not accurately characterize listeners’ sociolinguistic expectations. Recent work has shown that specific *personae*, or social types, can mediate links between linguistic styles and larger-scale social categories (e.g., D’Onofrio 2016). This paper presents a listening comprehension experiment with persona-based primes. Results illustrate that listeners’ expectations of Asians as non-native speakers are not categorical, but are instead mediated by more specific social types, supporting models of sociolinguistic knowledge that move beyond macro-social categories to incorporate *personae*. 
I argue that evidence from ellipsis licensing supports the view that head movement (HM) is not a narrow syntactic operation (Boeckx and Stjepanović 2001; Chomsky 2001; Schoorlemmer and Temminck 2012, i.a). Assuming certain heads license ellipsis, ellipsis behaves as though those heads do not move, even when they undergo HM. This observation follows if they remain in situ at LF and PF, and this falls out straightforwardly if HM is not narrow syntactic movement.

1. **The observation** The standard view of verb phrase ellipsis (VPE) is that it is triggered by a licensing head (LH) bearing the [E] feature (in English, an auxiliary). The LH imposes an identity requirement over the embedded LF and it is projected to PF (Arvaniti 1994). This allows ellipsis when an HH
Post-syntactic inflection of the degree phrase in German

Intro. Recent treatments of concord contend that adjectival inflection occurs post-syntactically through the insertion of Agr nodes onto individual, concord-bearing heads after Spell-Out (i.a. Norris 2014). I examine these claims against German inflection, demonstrating that current formulations of this approach are untenable. I argue however that a post-syntactic treatment of concord can desirably be maintained through the proposal that Agr node insertion occurs phrasally, at DegP.

Problem. Norris (2014) proposes that the realization of inflection is determined on a head-by-head basis: only concord-bearing elements in a language (e.g. $A^0$) trigger Agr node insertion, and it is only where Agr nodes are inserted that agreement is realized. (1) gives Norris’s rule, where $X$ is determined language-specifically:
The role of tongue position in laryngeal contrasts: Comparing Thai and Hindi

**Background.** Many languages have laryngeal contrasts in their obstruents, but there continues to be debate about their phonological and phonetic characterization. Utterance-initially, English voiced stops are often phonetically voiceless and voiceless stops are aspirated whereas Spanish voiced stops are realized with closure voicing (Lisker & Abramson 1964). One articulatory adjustment for initiating phonation is enlarging the supraglottal cavity volume via tongue root advancement (Westbury 1983). Previous research on English stops has shown that tongue position is more fronted for voiced than voiceless stops, and articulatory differences align with a more abstract two-way laryngeal distinction that is the same for Spanish and English even though the acoustic implementation is different (Ahn 2016). The current ultrasound study expands this line of research to examine the articulatory adjustments in laryngeal contrasts of Thai (three-way contrast) and Hindi (four-way contrast) by comparing tongue position of voiced, voiceless unaspirated, and voiceless aspirated stops.

**Hypothesis.** (1) If Thai and Hindi show the most advanced tongue root in voiced stops, with more advancement of voiceless unaspirated compared to voiceless aspirated ones, it might suggest that the advancement gesture facilitates a three-way contrast. (2) If two languages show advancement only for voiced stops, tongue root advancement is used to accomplish the voiced stops. (3) If two languages show tongue root advancement only for voiceless unaspirated stops, it would suggest that advancement is used for aspiration.
Children’s use of prosody and word order to indicate information status in English phrasal conjuncts

Adults typically mention old referents first before mentioning new referents (Bock and Irwin 1980; Arnold et al. 2000). However, Narasimhan & Dimroth (2008) showed that German preschoolers prefer to order new referents before old ones when using phrasal conjuncts (e.g., ‘a spoon and an egg’). Here we investigate phrasal conjuncts in 3-5-year-old and adult speakers of English to address the following questions: 1) Does ordering of new and old referents in phrasal conjuncts differ crosslinguistically in children and adults? 2) Do adults and children use prosody to signal information status reliably?

German has a relatively flexible word order, and adult speakers are likely to order constituents based on their information status, ‘old’ or ‘new’. In contrast, children learning languages with a relatively rigid word order, such as English, might avoid ordering referents based on information status. If English speakers nevertheless use word order to distinguish ‘old’ and ‘new’ referents, we have evidence of the strong influence of information status irrespective of crosslinguistic differences in word order flexibility. B: Not

In Germanic languages, noun phrases labeling new referents tend to bear nuclear accent, whereas noun phrases labeling old referents tend to bear nuclear stress (e.g., Bock & Irwin 1980). However, in B: English
Category 2: Statements of A, B assumed

The Role of Voice in Narrative: Prosody and Embodiment in Chilean Youth Narratives About Police Violence

This paper examines the use of prosodic features in narrative constructions of identity in the context of a modern carceral state (Foucault 1977). Data comes from ethnographic interviews with two 9th grade students about experiences of police violence during a 2016 student protest in Santiago de Chile. I argue that attention to prosody in oral narration adds qualitative contextual meaning by anchoring the speakers’ past and present embodied experiences in the multimodal semiotic organization of the body during narration (Mendoza-Denton & Jannedy 2015). Analysis of prosody in relation to speakers’ descriptions of violence against their bodies thus highlights the body as a source, instrument, and topic of personal narrative (Heavey 2015). The analysis contributes to a small but growing field of research involving voice quality, intonation, and social identity (Thomas 2011; Podesva & Callier 2015) by extending qualitative socio-prosodic methods (c.f. Selting 1994; M.H. Goodwin et al. 2012; Sicoli 2014) to narrative analysis.

Narratives of personal experience are valuable for research involving language and identity (Hill 1995; Schiffrin 1996) because they provide insight into the discursive emergence of “the self” in relation to others (Ochs & Capps 1996). In narratives described in this paper, speakers discursively perform identity (Bucholtz & Hall 2005) in relation to peer student protesters and carabineros, Chile’s militarized police force. Sociocultural linguistic approaches to narrative analysis contextualize stories as collaborative interactional processes between speakers (Bauman 1985; Georgakopoulou 2006; De Fina 2009), with most focusing on morphosyntactic features like discourse markers (Schiffrin 1988), tense, and aspect (Perrino 2011). I argue that because voices are socially mediated through embodied practices of speaking and hearing (Ziman 2012), analytical attention to prosody grounds emergent processes of collaborative meaning in the embodied material experiences of language-users.

B: No use of intonation in id. cons.

The following example represents a speaker’s intonation and voice quality while describing an
Category 2: Statements of A, B assumed

#NotAllMen accommodate: intraspeaker variation and male feminist allyship on Twitter

Recent work (Goldman 2017) found that when participating in Twitter discourse about gender equality, female Twitter users showed significant variation in features of stereotypical “women’s” or “powerless” language (Lakoff, 1975; O’Barr & Atkins, 1980). Specifically, when posting tweets tagged with “#yesallwomen”, women displayed higher frequency of profanity and significantly lower frequency of hedges, politeness markers, and stable nonstandard variants as compared to their Twitter posts on other topics.

The current study conducts a quantitative intraspeaker variation analysis in a group of self-identified men who contribute to feminist discourses on Twitter to see whether the previously observed intraspeaker variation is borne out in a male population. It was predicted that men would conform to the women’s linguistic style in female-dominated virtual spaces (Herring, 1996). Following Goldman (2017), the linguistic features studied here included markers of politeness, hedges, profanity, and stable nonstandard variants such as “wanna” or “gonna”, as
Homophones, Lexical Retrieval, and Sensitivity to Detail

Homophones can exhibit phonetic differences (Gahl 2008), though only when produced in meaningful contexts (Guion 1995); listeners can be sensitive to such details (Babel & Johnson 2010). Speed of lexical access can be influenced by a word’s homophone mate (Jescheniak & Levelt 1994), but in a perceptual task could homophones act as phonological neighbors (cf. Vitevitch & Luce 1999) and impede decisions? I present results from a perceptual study that addresses how sub-phonemic details and knowledge of the lexicon influence decisions about word identity. Listeners are sensitive to homophones being separate lexical items, and are weakly influenced by acoustic details, but cannot discriminate between homophones.
Answer: *Gradual* laying out of results

Within A/B logic, data is not just observed stuff, it is the first part of the answer: it is Evidence, tied up cohesively and thoroughly with what lies before, the question, and what is necessary for the next step: drawing the conclusion.

There is an art of laying out the evidence in a *gradual* measured way, which I often do not see in bad abstracts.

Sometimes the gradualness is intrinsic to the evidence:

1. Piece of Evidence 1: This supports A, but does not entirely remove support from B
2. Piece of Evidence 2: This supports A, but is truly inconsistent with B

This is the norm in psycholinguistics, where you could find a chain of such results.
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This quantitative study serves to triangulate and contextualize a qualitative analysis of the intersections of language and power in Disney and Pixar. By closely examining scenes where power imbalances are salient, we show that males in power are likely to use direct or aggravated directives to assert their dominance. This strategy is ratified in the world of the film by unmarked compliance and serious tone. Feminine power, in contrast, involves a heavier reliance on mitigated directives. Even in positions of royalty, female characters mitigated more heavily unless they were villains, reinforcing the ideology that associates gender non-conformity with deviance and evil. Our analysis also reveals patterns of domesticity and feminine power; women often take control through bald and aggravated directives in domestic situations, and seem to call on discourses of domesticity and maternity when enacting power in more public spheres. As a whole, these findings confirm previous observations about sex roles in children’s films and highlight the usefulness of linguistic methodology in analyzing media discourses.
Agreement Mismatches in Cayuga and Configurationality

**Nutshell:** Comitative arguments in Cayuga exhibit an uncommon agreement pattern. In a sentence such as *John and I left*, the verb exhibits 1.dual agreement; however, the only overt nominal is *John*. This observation has been used as an argument that overt nominals are not directly selected by verbs (Koenig & Michelson 2015, for Oneida, closely related to Cayuga). We present prosodic evidence that such mismatched nominals are clause peripheral as Koenig & Michelson argue, while agreeing nominals are, in fact, clause internal. Coupled with previous research on clause structure in Cayuga (Dyck 2009; Dyck et al. 2014), we argue for a configurational view of Cayuga.

**Background:** Cayuga is traditionally described as discourse-configurational or non-configurational (in the sense of Hale 1983). It exhibits extremely free word order and complex agreement patterns indexing both subject and object. Following Jelinek (1984) all overt nominal are clause peripheral. An example of mismatched agreement is found in (1). The agreement on the verb (1.dual) reflects the understood subject; however, the overt subject is simply *John*.

(1) E-j-áhy-a:-k-Ø John
    FACT-1.DU.EXCL-fruit-JOIN-eat-PUNC John ‘You and John ate an apple.’

**Data:** We present three lines of evidence that mismatched arguments are clause peripheral, while matched arguments are clause internal. (1) Mismatched arguments form their own intonational phrase (IntP). (2) differ in prosodic shape from matched arguments, and (3) cannot undergo wh-movement. First, non-utterance-final words have stress on the ultima, while utterance-final words do not (Chafe 1977). Observe that the verb in (1) does not have stress on the ultima. Contrast
comprehension (Rubin 1992), in which they filled in missing words from the passage they heard.

Voice and social prime significantly affected cloze task performance. Listeners hearing the L1-accented voice were more accurate overall than those hearing the Korean-accented voice (p=0.0038). For both voices, listeners who saw the “K-pop” prime performed better than those with the “White” prime (p=0.033). This was expected for the Korean-accented voice (McGowan 2014), but contradicted prior work showing that Asian faces hinder comprehension of L1-English (Rubin 1992, Babel & Russell 2015). Here, the K-pop picture improved performance regardless of voice, perhaps indicating that listeners anticipated comprehension difficulty and thus showed greater attention in listening.

Crucially, two depictions of the same Korean individual differed significantly: listeners with the “K-pop” picture performed better than those with the “Bro” picture (p=0.028); “Bro” patterned nearly identically to the “White” picture. This suggests that racialized linguistic expectations, and accompanying differences in comprehension, are linked with specific types within the racialized category, rather than with some phenotypical notion of “Asian.” Indeed, results reflect contradictory ideological notions of
One strategy I like is the (measured) use of metawords that describe argumentation. They're a very direct way to structure your argument, and to tell the reader/reviewer that you have mastered the art of “scientific” argumentation. They also add to coherence, since within the assumed structure of Hypothesis A/Hypothesis B skeleton of argumentation, they allow you to link the different parts of a discontinuous whole spanning the abstract. These are words such as: argue, hypothesize, ask, predict, evidence, results, conclude. We will now search for these words in the handout, containing the abstracts I spent the most time with.
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Right when you have posed your "question", and before you've laid out your evidence, you give a very brief and abstract sentence stating what you will conclude and why.

Later, as you're presenting your best evidence, you mention again that this is why this will lead to the conclusion, in perhaps less abstract language.

And at the end, when you're concluding, you lay out the conclusion in the least abstract fashion.

Again, this helps with cohesion, but also eliminates the possibility of getting the reader to read on, just because you're holding out on the conclusion.
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Strategy: Explicitness in conclusion

Very often, there is a big question being addressed, but most of the abstract is concerned with presenting a tight argument for new evidence for answering the big question. But the conclusion drawn is about the crucial test/evidence, and the conclusion about the big question is left implied. Sometimes this occurs, since additional tests are necessary to make a statement about the big question.

I think it's better to draw the big conclusion as well, adding any caveats necessary requiring further research for a full conclusion, and using language of the "found further support for", rather than staying with the new evidence/diagnostic.
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