Sample Prospectuses for Linguistics 120A sample papers

Note: I wrote these prospectuses AFTER I wrote the papers. They are really more like “abstracts” of the papers than “prospectuses”. Since a prospectus is really a proposal for a paper that you haven’t written yet, you probably will probably be describing your ideas for results in a more tentative way than in these samples.

“Voicing Dissimilation in Western Bade”

Bade is a Chadic language spoken in northeastern Nigeria. Data for this paper comes from original field work in Nigeria. Looking carefully at the Bade lexicon, one finds that there is a gap in consonant distribution: almost no words have two consecutive syllables beginning in voiced obstruent. Comparing words in Bade to cognate words in related languages, one sees that in the configuration [C, +voice]...[C, +voice], the first consonant has dissimilated to voiceless, e.g. Bade kaduwan vs. Hausa gada ‘duiker’, where Hausa shows the original consonants. In most varieties of Bade, this is just a statistical fact about the lexicon, but in “Far Western” Bade, this dissimilation is an active phonological rule. If a prefix with an underlying voiced obstruent is attached to a word beginning in a voiced obstruent the prefix consonant devoices, e.g. ga-nahwa ‘filled’ but ka-zgata ‘pierced’, where the adjective forming prefix /ga-/ devoices before the voiced obstruent z.

“The Feature [voice] and Boundaries in Bulgarian”

Bulgarian is a South Slavic language and is the national language of Bulgaria. Data for this paper comes from published grammars of Bulgarian, though I checked a few forms with native speakers. Like other Slavic languages, Bulgarian has two rules affecting obstruent consonants: Voicing Assimilation requires that an obstruent consonant agree in voicing with a following obstruent consonant. Word Final Devoicing devoices an obstruent when it is at the end of a word. These rules interact such that when a word ending in an obstruent is followed by a word beginning in an obstruent, the word final obstruent must agreeing in voicing with the following obstruent, but it is voiceless otherwise. However, prepositions and prefixes ending in voiced obstruents never devoice, regardless of the following consonant. This indicates that a “smaller” boundary separates prepositions and prefixes from the following word than the boundary that separates a “substantive” word, like a noun or verb, from a following word.

“Flapping and Other Fates of /t/ and /d/ in North American English”

English, a Germanic language spoken in many countries, has a wide array of dialects. Data for this paper is based on my own speech, which typifies that spoken by most native English speakers in North America. One well-known and well-described phonological process in this variety of English is the “flapping” rule that applies to /t/ and /d/ in words like Patty and paddy when they occur intervocalically before an unstressed syllable. Flapping, however, is just one of several processes affecting /t/ and /d/ before unstressed syllables, for example, rather than flapping, we find lateral release before syllabic /l/ as in bottle, and nasal release before syllabic /n/ as in ridden. These “reductions” of /t/ and /d/ are clearly all part of the same process, but available phonological formalisms do not provide a way to show this.