

Teaching statement (Line Mikkelsen)

My teaching philosophy has emerged as an outcome of managing tensions that present themselves in teaching in general and teaching linguistics in particular. Below I describe what to me are the three central tensions and how they have affected my teaching and teaching goals during my time at Berkeley.

The first tension is between teaching students how to do linguistics (data gathering, problem solving, and theory building) and teaching them about the field of linguistics through its literature, development, and major results. In my undergraduate studies at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, the latter method of instruction dominated to the extent that there was only one required undergraduate course in linguistic analysis. The class had very little in the way of homework; instead the instructor would demonstrate linguistic analyses in class and we would attempt to mimic these on the final exam. I graduated from that program with a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the field of linguistics but almost no ability to do linguistic analysis. In other words, I was a rather pompous wanna-be linguist who could talk the talk, but would stumble when confronted with unknown data.

During my graduate training at UC Santa Cruz, I experienced the other extreme. Linguistics majors read very little (no primary research literature and most courses have no textbook) and even in graduate courses, the socratic method dominates. Syntax, which is my area of specialization, is taught through substantial and challenging weekly homeworks, in which students are forced to come up with analytical solutions to novel data and problems. Homework solutions then serve as the basis of class discussion and over the course of the term build to a cohesive and detailed understanding of a select portion of English syntax. Students leave the Santa Cruz program with outstanding analytical skills—when presented with a set of data and asked for an analysis they always deliver—but, at least for undergraduates, they know very little about their field. In the best case, this ignorance is innocent (the student goes on to do something other than linguistics) or short-lived (the

student goes to graduate school in linguistics), but in other cases it leads to cockiness and disrespect for the scholarly tradition. The obvious solution is to balance the two approaches; the constant challenge is how to do that without losing the distinct advantages of each.

I have no general formula for this of course, but I have experimented in various ways during my time at Berkeley. In our graduate syntax sequence, for instance, I now use the Socratic method in the fall semester, while the spring course is centered on readings from the syntax literature (the particular readings vary from year to year). Using the two methodologies in this order has additional advantages: having experienced first hand how difficult it is to develop an empirically and theoretically satisfying analysis, students can appreciate the contributions of the readings, instead of focussing exclusively on the shortcomings. Conversely, in the fall course, students are free to develop their own analyses and modes of argumentation without having a particular model or end goal in mind. I'm not quite sure why, but this sequencing also seems to lower the occurrence of writer's block later on.

The second tension is between teaching what I know (and love) and teaching what I don't know (and fear). This issue presents itself most dramatically when I teach introduction to linguistic science (Ling 100, which an upper-division course required for linguistics and cognitive science majors). The course covers certain foundational material in the core analytical subfields of linguistics (phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics), but beyond that the instructor is free to choose which topics to emphasize or add. The first time I taught the course (S06) I was extremely conscious of my weakness in phonetics and phonology and strove very hard to cover those topics thoroughly. As a consequence, semantics and pragmatics, which are closer to my area of expertise and to my heart, got short shrift, and I was not very happy with the course overall. As I was preparing to teach the course again this term, I told one of my colleagues about my phonetics woes and he encouraged me to shift the course towards the topics I enjoy teaching with the justification that one of the goals of the introductory course is to draw interested students into the major

and that one does that best when teaching material that one is knowledgeable and truly excited about. I followed his advice and reorganized the syllabus towards syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. It's too early to say what the overall effect of this reorganization will be, but this time around I feel that I am giving the students *my* introduction to linguistics, and not trying to meet some abstract goal of representing all parts of the field equally and impartially.

The final tension is between teaching students to be critical of the presented material and teaching the material on its own terms. Berkeley students seem naturally critical, especially the graduate students, and early on I noticed that for some students their overly critical attitude seemed to prevent a deeper engagement with the material. My response is to appeal to the principle that one must always give the analysis or claim that one wants to argue against the best chance to succeed. This applies on homework problems, when discussing an assigned reading in class, or when responding to a conference talk or colloquium. On the graduate side, this has allowed my students to engage more productively with the field of syntax, whether it be through conference participation or publications, without losing their edge.

There is one other principle that guides me in teaching and that is that everyone in the room must learn something from every class, including me. Of course, I can't predict what I'll learn in a particular class, but I feel I have figured out how to set the stage and tone so that I am likely to learn something and most of the time I do. This keeps me engaged in teaching and furthers my own intellectual development class by class and course by course.

It has become increasingly clear to me that I love teaching, though I don't really know why. There are no other teachers in my family (my parents and their parents were engineers, homemakers, barbers, and horse traders) and I was never pushed to apply myself in school or to pursue higher education. My own teachers, from elementary school through graduate school, have influenced me deeply, but I never feel an urge to try to be like them or to push

their teaching agendas. In the end, it might simply boil down to the fact that I am drawn to teaching as a collaborative, but focused and uncompromising enterprise that can, at least temporarily, obliterate whatever boundaries exist outside the class room and bring people and their ideas together in pursuit of something greater than the individual.