

TEACHING STATEMENT

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My teaching is highly eclectic and dynamic. Each time I teach a course, I evaluate my audience, learning goals, content, and the material that is available to me. I strive to create optimal learning conditions by identifying the best methods and instructional tools that fit my goals and audience. I use a diverse array of theoretical approaches and teaching methodologies and I do not hesitate to change any method or tool when I realize it does not foster learning or a better one is available.

Goals

Although each course I teach has its own specific learning objectives, overall, my teaching is guided by the following goals: 1) showing my students that natural language is an object of scientific study, 2) teaching them some fundamental concepts in theoretical linguistics (e.g. hierarchy, recursion, compositionality, etc. at introductory levels; cyclicity, dependency, locality, etc. at advanced levels), and 3) equipping them with the necessary skills and the mindset to do independent scientific work on natural language. To this end, I strive to make the material interesting by relating it to students' backgrounds and providing reasons for studying the material as I believe that learning is best when students are intrinsically motivated. I consider my teaching successful when my students can form hypotheses using the concepts discussed in class and test them.

Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is guided by my teaching goals, my formal pedagogical training as a teacher, and my teaching experience in diverse settings. Learning involves comprehending theoretical concepts and mastering the skills and tools to deconstruct, analyze, and reconstruct theoretical concepts guided by empirical observation. When teaching theoretical concepts, I rely heavily on active classroom discussion by asking questions that encourage students to identify the assumptions, main claims, key data that motivates the claims, and exceptions. I also urge them to change some of the assumptions of a given theory or extend it to novel data to test the predictions and the limits of the theory. My students commented on how much they benefit from this way of instruction:

- I liked that it was a completely new topic for me and that the professor made sure to break down and explain the material in a manner in which I was able to always understand.*
- His notes were organized and he thoroughly explained every concept.*
- Professor Atlamaz made learning about linguistics accessible; he explained things in a straightforward, simple (and humorous at times) manner that allowed me to not feel intimidated by the course material.*

To ensure that my students master the formal tools and the analytical skills required by linguistic inquiry, I use a substantial amount of data sets for practicing the formal tools and theory building skills. (I provide some of these exercises in Section 4 of this teaching dossier.) Although I have never had the opportunity of teaching at advanced levels, I believe these principles are valid and applicable at this level, too. One thing that I consider essential particularly at advanced level courses is fostering independent research skills. For this, I find term papers valuable as they provide students with an opportunity to do independent research in a controlled setting.

Pedagogical Principles and Methods

In addition to my linguistics-specific teaching philosophy, I incorporate a set of pedagogical principles in my teaching. These principles are based on my pedagogical training as a teacher, classroom observations, teaching experience, and suggestions from my colleagues.

Active and Student-oriented Teaching

The term *Active Learning* was coined by R.W. Revans and gained prominence especially with research in Cognitive Constructivism by Jean Piaget and the works of social constructivist Lev Vygotsky. The main findings of Piaget's and Vygotsky's work showed that learning involves active meaning construction but not mere habit formation (as suggested by behaviorist theories¹). My observations and teaching convinced me that learning is best when students actively take part in the class. To achieve active learning, I make my teaching as student-oriented as possible. Making classes student-oriented increases student contribution and attention, fosters active learning, and makes classes more stimulating and fun.

To make my teaching more student-oriented, I try to tailor my teaching style and material according to my students' needs and interests. At the beginning of each semester, I ask my students about their expectations and interests. I try incorporating material that suits my students' expectations staying within the main goals of my course. As the semester unfolds, I let my students contribute to some decisions regarding material and its delivery. This increases their responsibility and motivation.

Another way that I achieve active class discussion is through in-class assignments. I often assign in-class hands-on tasks during which students work in groups. This provides active discussion among students in a less stressful environment and provides more opportunities for everyone to participate in the class discussion. During these tasks, I walk around and interact with each student especially by addressing them with their names. This helps students focus on the assigned task instead of getting distracted by other conversations and also gives me the opportunity to get to know my students closer and help the ones who need some clarification. I find this practice very useful and valuable. A student of mine recently wrote in their course evaluations:

... In one class, he saw how I was doing the work in phonetics. He knew that I was struggling with that part of phonetics. He showed me the correct way to solve the formulas in phonetics in a way that I would understand. It was one of the coolest things I ever experienced in Rutgers. I went from not understanding how to do the problem to completely understanding how to do the problem and I got a perfect score on the midterm in that specific area.

These group activities also create a collaborative learning atmosphere. I find collaboration important as it leads to reinforcement, complementation, or a conflict of ideas, which are all valuable learning opportunities. A collaborative learning environment also gives the students an opportunity to learn how to work with others, which I consider crucial as it prepares students for collaborative and interdisciplinary research. one of my students wrote:

¹Although, I agree with constructivists in that higher order learning requires meaning formation and active contribution of the learner, I believe that Behaviorism has valid arguments in certain types of learning that requires automatic behavior and skills. For example, learning the IPA chart or drawing syntactic trees requires a certain amount of practice and reinforcement. I am quite eclectic in choosing the theoretical frameworks I adopt as I believe each theory has some strengths and limitations.

I really liked the way the course was setup, and that it was not too much book work. Rather, it was a class collaboration and we were all engaged by working on the worksheet Professor Atlamaz created for us. I liked that we all went over a lot of practice problems in class and had opportunities to ask questions and discuss course material.

Welcoming Multiple Intelligences

Another principle that I strive to implement is what Howard Gardner coined *welcoming multiple intelligences*. The theory of multiple intelligences suggests that people learn in different ways ranging from linguistic input to visual guides or tactile input.² I use a range of tools and instructional technology to cater for the needs of different learners. These tools range from the good old blackboard to slides, videos, lollipops (for teaching place of articulation features), balloons (for vibration in vocal cords), games (Bingo! for practicing IPA Chart) Praat (for acoustic phonetics), tree drawing software, and so on. I also incorporate fun activities and games as they cater for different learning styles and increase attention.

Inquiry-Based Learning

One of my overarching goals as a college teacher is to help my students become independent researchers who can obtain information, evaluate it, analyze and create complex knowledge or theories with it. This is a skill and like many other skills, it can be learnt by *doing*. I believe such skills are learnt best in guided settings where the student does the work and the teacher plays an advisory role. I believe inquiry-based learning is best when students work on topics that interest them. At more advanced levels, term papers usually fulfill this duty. At introductory levels, assigning term papers to students who have not acquired the necessary tools could be frustrating. For this reason, I assign little snippets of tasks whereby students, depending on their interest, can inquire a topic (language families, sign language, word order across languages (SOV, SVO, OVS), etc.) and do a short in-class presentation. I am always fascinated by the work students present as they always find things that I did not know or anticipate.

Evaluation and Feedback

Evaluation is one of the fundamental aspects of teaching. It provides me and my students with feedback about the success of learning and shows our weaknesses. Yet, I think this is of secondary importance. What I find more valuable is the opportunity it provides for novel learning. Assignments and exams are crucial as they are moments of concentrated motivation. Students usually dedicate an uninterrupted period of time with high motivation to achieve a good grade. I like to take advantage of this concentrated motivation. Throughout the semester, I assign problem sets that do not only test students' knowledge but also challenge them to apply their knowledge to novel problems in a guided setting. I usually add some bonus challenge questions to keep them engaged with material and do some independent inquiry. I also hold review sessions dedicated to exams and key assignments to take advantage of high motivation. Most students pay really close attention in these sessions and I can see how they learn deep concepts. This mindset reflects on my course design where I provide frequent assignments that have a significant weight in grade calculation. I believe that learning should be challenging but achievable. Students become independent

²Gardner's (1983) original work proposed eight abilities. Although, there has been some criticism on Gardner's exact classification, I believe that the overall theory teaches us something valuable and I incorporate it into my teaching through use of different instructional tools.

learners when they are challenged and they make an achievement. Some of the statements from my students confirms my thoughts:

- *I feel like my dendritic branching exponentially increased because of how much I learned.*
- *This class gave me headaches sometimes but it was so interesting.*

Evaluation turns into an authentic learning opportunity with feedback. I strive to provide immediate constructive feedback for my students. Feedback needs to be immediate to give the student an opportunity to learn while the material is still relevant. It needs to be constructive and specific so that students can turn it into learning by addressing their own weaknesses.

Technology

I am a tech-savvy person. I like to keep up to date with general technological innovations as well as instructional technologies. I am familiar with a broad range of instructional technologies ranging from rusty overhead projectors to high-tech smart boards or online teaching platforms. I always use online course delivery platforms as part of my teaching and benefit from a range of technologies involving sound recorders, projectors, slides, videos, etc. Yet, I believe successful use of technology requires a lot of thinking, planning and practice. With care and attention, a blackboard with some colored chalk can be way more stimulating than the most advanced instructional technologies. The following principles guide my use of technology in classroom and my teaching in general.

Technology is a tool for learning and it should be used as long as it facilitates teaching and learning. Using technology is a great way of drawing attention. Slides with animations, short videos, websites on the internet catch attention and helps students focus on the material under discussion. Yet, long videos, dull slides with a lot of text, websites where pop-up windows and ads attack senses are either too boring or too distracting for pedagogical purposes and should be avoided.

“Don’t trust tech!” This was the most repeated phrase during my formal training at college. Technology can always go wrong. A good teacher needs to be prepared for cases when a computer breaks down, the internet gets disconnected, or a myriad of ways in which the equipment does not work. I usually prepare a few versions of my slide presentations (PPT, PDF) and test it several times in the class before I use it for instruction. I always have a back-up plan when I use tech in the classroom.

Technology is not only a tool for catching attention but also a massive source of knowledge and an invaluable platform for instruction. I have attended several workshops on online teaching regarding the best practices in online teaching. I will continue attending such workshops and would love to develop and teach online courses.

Attitude and Approachability

I truly love teaching. I find it to be one of the highest human endeavors and the best therapy. I don’t remember one class where I didn’t feel uplifted. My mantra in interaction with my students is *empathy*. I strive to treat my students the way I would like to be treated. Many of my students express my approachability and passion for teaching in their course evaluations.

- *Professor Atlamaz was very enthusiastic.*

- The professor. He was extremely helpful, he was accommodating. He was a good teacher as well as just a friendly person.*
- Mr. Atlamaz was a wonderful teacher, his energy and enthusiasm made me excited to learn.*
- The instructor was extremely helpful, nice and approachable; his teaching style made learning more enjoyable and understandable.*

Teaching Experience

I have received my B.A. in Foreign Language Education and have taught a number of different courses in linguistics and other fields, in diverse settings. I started my teaching career as a Teaching Assistant at Boğaziçi University in Turkey. I TAed for several different courses including Introduction to Language and Linguistics, Turkish-English Contrastive Analysis, Phonology, and The Structure of Modern Turkish. As a TA, I held recitation sessions and office hours in addition to preparing and grading assignments. During my time at Boğaziçi University, I gained a significant amount of experience in teaching linguistics at different levels. During my time at Rutgers, I have taught Introduction to Linguistic Theory (LING 201) for a total of four semesters in five different sections. The first time I taught at Rutgers, I was a TA for Veneeta Dayal. My duties involved holding recitation hours, office hours, preparing and grading assignments and exams. During other four times, I was the instructor for the entire course. I developed the syllabus and prepared the course material. At Rutgers, LING 201 is taught as a survey of many subfields of linguistics including Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics and the students come with diverse backgrounds. Students are likely to not have taken any linguistics courses before, which makes this course quite challenging for students and also a good platform to raise awareness about the field as well as laying foundations for future linguists. Over the years, I have improved my syllabus, material and teaching skills based on feedback from my students and my observations. I find this course extremely valuable for my teaching skills as I get the opportunity of questioning the basic assumptions in the field as well as learning how to present complex facts and theories in an easily digestible way.

Apart from my teaching experience in linguistics, I have taught a variety of courses outside the field. I worked as an ESL/EFL teacher at the college level in Turkey for two years. In addition, I taught Turkish for three summers at the renowned Turkish Language and Culture Program in Istanbul, Turkey. For the last two years, I have been teaching in the Writing Program at Rutgers University, a nationally recognized program that fosters critical thinking and focuses on academic writing skills. This is one of the most challenging courses offered at Rutgers for both the students and the instructors. It is a skill-oriented course where students are urged to discuss some contemporary issues (ranging from education, homosexuality, religion, to consumerism, identity, gender, and politics), develop creative, critical, and connective thinking as well as organizing their ideas in a coherent manner in five-page essays. Throughout the semester, students write five essays all of which are thoroughly reviewed and commented. I find teaching this course extremely challenging and rewarding as it gives me the opportunity to improve my teaching skills in diverse settings, improve my critical and creative thinking skills, and carry my expertise in linguistics to a domain outside linguistics.