

Linguists of all stripes are familiar with certain frequently asked questions like “Oh, you’re a linguist? Wow! How many languages do you speak?” And, of course: “Linguistics, huh? So what can you do with that?”

A major problem with this second question is that it seems to demand a simple response—in fact, it often surfaces with a proffered answer that suggests how linguistics might be relevant in the world of work: “Are you going to be a professor?” “Are you going to teach/edit/translate?” And while these answers are valid ones for many linguists, they also represent only a tiny fraction of the kinds of work that linguists might do.

The question “So what can you do with that?” also frames the career process as linear, which is problematic for many reasons, among them that careers are never linear. The question points to cultural assumptions and expectation that education can and should relate directly to employment. But the connections between training and occupation are never so clear-cut, and this can be a difficult point to make with well-meaning interlocutors who may have little understanding of what it is that linguists—interactional sociolinguistic or otherwise—actually *do*.

The title of this book asks you as a reader to consider the connection between linguistics and work, and specifically how to bring your linguistics training to your thinking about career. Your training has left you with a sophisticated understanding of language and how it works to engage audiences, build communities, construct identities, and reflect and reconfigure social structure. While the path is rarely linear, linguistics

is highly portable, and its applicability extends far beyond the ivory tower.

The skills of a linguist are applicable in just about every professional context. Critical awareness of communication is needed in every setting where two or more people come into regular contact to get things done, and thus every workplace. Your job may require you to craft written messages that motivate and inspire, or speak in ways that comfort and reassure. You may need to parse, analyze, summarize, interview, or present. You will interact with interlocutors from all kinds of social and institutional backgrounds. And for the rest of your life, the way that you do these things and the way that you think about them will absolutely be informed by your background in and training in linguistics.

However, and to our collective loss as a field, many linguistics grads who have found enriching and intellectually rigorous work outside of the academy unfortunately may hesitate to describe the work they do as “linguistics.” As I suggest, this is at least partially owing to a lack of knowledge about the connections and applicability of linguistics on both sides of the job searching equation: linguists about the world of work, and the world of work about linguistics. Thus, I focus on the processes that bridge these worlds, the texts and interactions which comprise five genres of professional self-presentation: resumes, cover letters, LinkedIn, informational interviews and job interviews.

First and foremost, this book is designed to help those who have studied linguistics to develop critical awareness of the skills we already possess as analysts of language. All of us, no matter what our specialization, have been trained to bring

added layers of analytical understanding how language works, and crucially, we have been trained to maintain critical distance from language. We treat language as data, we are empiricists.

We can (and should) use all of this to our benefit in the process of searching for a job. The process of searching for a job is highly textual - bringing linguistics to this process can inform and enrich it, including by helping you get (or *build!*) a job that speaks to your skills, interests, and indeed your passions.

This book brings a linguistics lens to the job search. Its simple premise is that your training in linguistics has provided you with a unique set of analytical skills and a particular way of listening, both of which are powerful assets for your career. The ability to engage in fine-grained analysis of language is highly transferrable, and thus can have material rewards in the high-stakes textual contexts of the job search, whether you are researching the websites of potential employers, crafting documents that tell a compelling story, preparing for an effective interview interaction, or networking with potential colleagues. Thus, after reading this book, you will not only have a much better sense for the ways that linguistics can be marketable and usable on the job, but also how these may be brought to the series of texts and interactions that comprise job searching.

Many linguists have used their training and background as springboards to create jobs that they are passionate about. I'll tell some of their stories throughout this book. By giving you glimpses into the lives, decisions, and practices of career linguists, I offer a detail-oriented and social-scientific empirical view of career. I hope that these stories will help you see the

interrelated processes of job searching and building a career in a new light.

Students of interactional sociolinguistics will recognize the benefit of adopting an analytical focus on interaction in conceptualizing a job search. Your initial inquiries and first contacts, your resume and cover letter, your interviews, site visits and follow-ups are all interactive events. Adopting this approach can help us see how we might bring our awareness of the constitutive pieces of language, and that meanings are constructed to take a step back from an interaction (even one that we are part of) to think about interactional goals, how they were accomplished while perspective shifting to attend to both participants in the interaction.

Those with an interest in narrative will recognize the powerful thread of narrative that runs through the various texts that create and support a job search. It's not surprising, then, that this book concerns itself with the narratives of career—the stories about ourselves that we create for (and with) others. Consider for example what it might mean to analyze a resume as a narrative, or to think about the narratives which comprise a resume

In the three sections of the book, I outline three aspects of the story process which help to navigate the career process and which relate to different research activities for the job seeker: story finding, story listening and story telling. As I will show, the skills of a linguist are relevant and helpful tools in each. As I will also explore, these phases articulate with a narrative approach to career as applied research. offers both practical and personal benefits, and may be thought of as an opportunity for conducting research *right now!*