

General Notes on Conferences
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- I.** What good are conferences?
- (1) Conferences serve many purposes. Probably the **least** important is exchange of ideas. This is so because it is so hard to convey anything interesting and significant in 10 or 12 or 20 minutes. (But do expect to find out in a general way what's going on in the field; what topics and approaches are 'hot'.)
 - (2) Much more important is the opportunity to meet people in the field, to make contacts that might later help you in your research (or in your job hunts).
 - a. Buy or make cards with your name, university, address, phone number, and, especially, e-mail address. Offer them to the people you meet.
 - b. Bring along reprints and copies of your papers to give out to potentially interested people. Make sure that these, too, have your contact information.
 - (3) Most important is the chance to make a positive impression, to begin to establish yourself as someone significant.
- II.** How can you make a good impression?
- (4) Give a good presentation. (See separate handout for hints.)
 - (5) Seek out linguists working on areas related to yours. Arrange to meet with them to discuss their work (and maybe yours).
 - (6) Ask questions and/or make suggestions during the conference sessions. This can be one of the most effective ways to make a good impression.
 - a. Make the question very clear and right to the point.
 - b. A bad question: "What about Swahili?"
 - c. A bad question: "What about Smith (1993)?"
 - d. Say exactly what phenomenon or theoretical issue you are concerned with, and precisely how it relates to the presentation. Give an example if possible, and briefly summarize what is relevant about your example.
 - e. If you can't do all of this extremely succinctly (for example, because the issue or the example is too complicated), don't ask the question. (For example, if it would take 5 minutes of background for your point to be comprehensible.)
 - f. Don't ask a question that's relevant only to some theory known only to you.
 - g. Don't be antagonistic. You might be convinced that the presenter is wrong; but that doesn't make him or her your enemy.
 - h. If the presenter raised a problem for his/her own analysis, offer a potential solution.
 - i. Suggest a further phenomenon that supports the basic point of the presentation.

- (7) After the session, find the presenter and ask questions or make suggestions.
 - a. If an example in a language you know wasn't quite right in a presentation, write down the correct version and humbly offer it to the presenter.
 - b. Offer further supporting (or disconfirming, but very diplomatically in this case) data.
 - c. Offer to send relevant work of your own.
 - d. Ask to be sent related work, written version of the talk, etc.
- (8) (6) and (7) are equally applicable to colloquium presentations.
 - a. Silence after a colloquium presentation can make the whole department look bad.
 - b. Questions and comments not only make the questioner look good, they make the department seem like an intellectually lively and exciting place (enhancing everyone's job prospects). And questions from students are much more important than questions from faculty members in this regard. Wouldn't you want to hire a student from a department where the students are knowledgeable and engaged?