How to choose a topic

1. Define a domain by language, social group, situation.
2. Choose a phenomenon that occurs naturally in that domain (not polite terms of address in academic papers).
3. Naturally occurring data is of course of the greatest interest for this course.
4. Having said that, data collection should, ideally, be over when you start this paper. Pre-existing corpora are great, but they need to be appropriate for your topic (see previous point). If you don’t have appropriate pre-existing data, begin collecting data at once, and begin sampling collected data at once, to guarantee that you are indeed getting instances of the phenomenon you want to write about.
5. Everyone should get their chosen topic approved by me by the paper approval deadline given on the course outline about their topic.
I. The Problem: Identify the phenomenon. State how it relates to the subject matter in the course. If there is no literature section, this section should identify a body of literature on your topic, and “create a research space” (CARS), that is, identify a gap in the literature that this paper begins to fill. That “space” or “gap” in the literature should be intimately tied up with your statement of what the problem is.

II. Data: Describe collection process or an existing dataset

III. Literature: Optional. Include this if you need to discuss the claims of one or more papers in some detail, for example, if you are going to specifically refute some paper.

IV. Approach: This section discusses how your data analysis and collection will proceed. If you are using an existing data set, explain how you will select a relevant sample.
Outline donts

1. Don’t have outline subheadings that are the names of chapters in Levinson’s book or Birner’s book; identify a specific phenomenon in the data that you will focus on.

2. Don’t write about looking at data without having looked at it. You need to be able to state some specific fact of interest that you have observed that is interesting. So avoid: “We will search the entire text of Don Quixote looking for generalizations concerning the use of por favor.”