Laurel Sutton: Hello, and welcome to another Linguistics Careercast, the podcast devoted to exploring careers for linguists outside academia. I'm your host, Laurel Sutton. Our guest today is Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender. She holds a PhD in Spanish from Pennsylvania State University and received her master's degree in 2005 from the same institution. She also holds a master's degree in history. She was an assistant professor of Spanish at Shepherd University for 12 years before moving into industry. Now she designs, creates and delivers a wide variety of language content to multiple levels of language learning in Spanish and German at online learning companies like Mango Languages, Babbel and Education First. Topics for today include multilingualism, language creation, research, sociolinguistics, language learning apps and contract work. So I'm welcoming our guest here. It's Eva, who is going to talk about her journey from Spanish mostly (right?) — that's mostly what you studied — through academia and now into a career in industry. So why don't you introduce yourself and talk a little bit about your background in linguistics, where you went to school, what got you interested in linguistics in the first place? And very curious, what did you think was going to happen with your degree? Like, did you have a plan?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Well, thank you very much for having me. Yes. Hello. My name is Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender. It's a long name, I know. There's a history to it. So what seems like a long time ago, I was at a juncture in my career where we had moved out of personal reasons, and I found myself in a situation where I couldn't easily find the sort of jobs I'd done before. Before that, I taught languages at language schools, mostly to businesspeople. So what I did was I sort of roamed around on the internet to see what was going on in my new hometown, and what I found was that at the university — and this is Penn State — at the university, there were some people studying bilingualism. I thought, “Wow,” you know. And I contacted the… I felt very brave, I contacted the professor who headed that lab. She was in psychology, and they were doing psycholinguistics, which I'd never heard of. And she was just super friendly and nice, and she invited me to their meetings, where the students, you know, talked about their research and their thoughts and their questions, and that's how I sort of fell into that fold, if you like. From there on, I met a few people from the Spanish department, and I took a few classes and decided, just for myself if you will, and decided that I wanted to pursue linguistics. And then the question became, did I want to pursue it in the psychological, you know, community, or did I want to do it with a language? And since I already knew some people from the Spanish department, I thought, “Well, maybe that's sort of like a little bit of a calling, which I usually wouldn't call it, but maybe there's something inside of me that wants to pursue that more.” And I applied, and they accepted me. So, you know, fast forward a few rather stressful years in grad school. I graduated with a PhD in Hispanic Linguistics. I decided to focus on sociolinguistics after, you know, checking things out a little bit, and I did most of my research on the relationship, linguistic differences in relationship between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, sort of looking at societal judgment of dialects and how they're tied to socioeconomic income, racial background and things like that. So that, that really excited me. I thought that was just, you know, just a very linguistically, very interesting topic and something that sort of also motivated me. So I went on the job market in 2009, which was not an easy feat because that was a sort of difficult period. That's putting it mildly.

Laurel Sutton: I remember that. Yeah.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Putting it mildly. And I got a position at a small liberal arts school in the panhandle of West Virginia called Shepherd University. I really enjoyed my work there. My colleagues were really great and supportive, and I enjoyed the work I did. We were a small, small, small subsection of the Department of English and Modern Languages. My colleague and I, we managed the Spanish part of things. We had a colleague who did French, and we have one faculty member who also taught some German. For those of you who are looking for a job in a small department, it was, I think it was probably for me a very good decision in the sense that, you know, you can broaden yourself a little bit. I think if you're very much in a research environment, you know, if that's the thing you want to do, just go for it. But I could really tap into different interests, so I could also teach a little German and I could teach cultural courses as well as some introductory linguistic classes next to languages. So that kept me going for a good, good amount of time. You can tell by the tone of my voice that it's going somewhere else.

Laurel Sutton: So just to back up for a second. So, you've always been multilingual?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes, yes, yes. Going back to my name, my father was from Spain, and my mother was from Germany. I was actually born a Spanish citizen, because back then German women's nationality was not automatically given to their children, which later on was changed. So I grew up both nationalities and mostly both languages. I mostly grew up in Germany, so, you know, probably a little bit more on the German side through education and things like that. But yeah, so that's my background. So that, you know, sort of when I was at the instance where I decided which department could I join, I think the Spanish one was calling me a little bit more simple because it just hadn't been, it'd been there, but not at the forefront, so I really was curious to explore it.

Laurel Sutton: Interesting. I don't know much about the programs at Penn. So did you get your linguistics degree through the Spanish department or did they have a linguistics department?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: They have a lingui… At that point they had a linguistics minor. They had… Otherwise, linguistics was within language departments. You could do a PhD in German linguistics, Spanish linguistics.

Laurel Sutton: Okay. Got it.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: French linguistics.

Laurel Sutton: All right. Interesting. And then when you were at Shepherd… You mentioned this right at the end. So you were teaching most, you were in the Spanish department, but you were teaching some linguistics classes too, correct?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes. Yeah. So they, that was part of the reason, I think, why they hired me. And one of the advantages of being in a smaller department is that you can propose classes. And that's what I did. I said, “I think our students need a class in phonetics and phonology, especially those who will be teaching Spanish,” you know? And I just went and did that. I did an intro to bilingualism studies in Spanish for majors and minors. I did a class in, I did a basic introduction to linguistics one semester, including morphology and semantics and all that. That proved to be a little bit too much, so I decided later on to split it. Just, it's just a lot of information in a relatively short span of time.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: And what else? I did a class on sociolinguistics, dialects. Yes.

Laurel Sutton: So then at some point you weren't in academia anymore. So tell us how that happened.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yeah. So I think there was a change happening at some point for me where I felt like I needed to be doing something else, maybe. And it wasn't because of my colleagues or the department or anything super dramatic, but it can be a little challenging in a language department, big or small, and as you know, if there are financial issues at a university, or as many of you of the listeners know, you know, the tendency is to put a little bit more pressure on the humanities than others. You know, our colleagues in sciences will say no, they also put pressure on them, which is true, but multiple times, you know, we worried about our program and that, it just, I think it got a little bit to me. And at the same time I was looking to explore something else. I think I was looking to break out a little bit, and I just contacted a few people. I thought, “Ooh, you know, what can you do with linguistics outside of university?” You know, I hadn't really heard about those. So I went and contacted a few people. I went to a few sessions run by, I think it was the LSA and I ran into… Well, I didn't run into her. I found her. Certainly not during the pandemic. Anna Marie Trester…

Laurel Sutton: Yes.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: … who offers, yes, who offers classes (right?) to sort of explore your, your interests and things like that. And I thought that's a really good start to just brainstorm a little bit. At that point, I wasn't thinking of leaving academia at all. It was more sort of like, you know, sort of exploring new avenues and “What can I do?” and, you know, “What would be the benefits?” and that sort of thing. And yes, after that, and a few informational interviews, which I learned all about in that time and in that class, I thought, “Well, you know, there's a whole world out there I hadn't considered,” and although I was still a little nervous about it, I sort of more and more tended towards it, which was a difficult decision for multiple reasons, one of which was that I was a little insecure about how I would approach this. But there came a point where I was like, “Well, either I'm going to try it or I'm not.” And so I decided to try it.

Laurel Sutton: So was it, for you, was it a decision to dip your toe into industry work while still continuing in your position at Shepherd, or were you thinking, “I just need to make a break?”

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I did that… I'm happy you asked. I did that a little bit. For a little while, I just did a few hours with a company that offers online teaching materials, and that was just a few hours a week, but I'm so happy I took that chance because, first of all, they were very, very nice, very understanding and respectful, and it was a very positive environment. And I thought, “Oh, okay, so this is what people do.”

Laurel Sutton: Uh-huh.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: So I mean, I mean, you know, content creation is just one of the things that you could do, you know, but one of many things, but I thought, “This is interesting, and it's sort of based on something that I've done. It's close to class preparation.”

Laurel Sutton: Yes.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: You know? I thought, “Well, you know, maybe I should be looking into this, because this is not a huge jump mentally, you know. It's not doing something radically different, and I can sort of see how the linguistics training sort of, you know, is reflected in it.”

Laurel Sutton: So you just touched on something I was going to ask you about. Something that a lot of folks, not necessarily struggle with, but need to know how to frame and talk about and utilize their linguistics training in their jobs, because it's not always a one-to-one thing. You know, you're not going into a job and doing a phoneme chart or something, right? It's more subtle than that. And there are different skills that we learn as linguists that are extremely applicable to jobs. So what would you say from your training that you were able to carry over into the work? Like, what was the most important stuff?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: That’s an excellent question. I think I'm still thinking about it, because it's not like a finished process, but off the top of my head, up until now, I would say that learning to do research is one of the things that I use every day, whether it be for applying for a position, because you need to figure out who you're applying for, to creating the content that I do. I don't always know the topic by heart, you know, what are the newest, you know, what is the newest information I can find on topic XYZ. That would be one of the first things I think I learned, or apply.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah, we are good researchers, linguists, we like to get into it and study it to death, you know. Like, don't put a deadline on me finding out all there is to know about this topic.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes, the deadline, yes, can be critical and difficult, but critical thinking skills cannot hurt, and we learn plenty of that. And as a linguist, I find myself constantly, especially a sociolinguist, constantly wanting to point out that there are varieties of the language. You know, if you're teaching a language, you're sort of caught, because on the one hand, you have to teach the perceived standard (right?) because that is what, you know, the students expect, it's what they need also, you know, to be, you know, universally understood in any community, but at the same time, if you're in a country — and that is ultimately what we're preparing people to do, whether it's as a tourist, or if you're working there — you will run into regional differences. And that, of course, as a sociolinguist, you know, looking at dialects, I'm just burning to use it, you know. So wherever I feel a little bit more comfortable in the workplace, I'll say, “You know, we could, you know, talk about, you know, we can introduce a few words here, you know, doesn't have to be a big thing, but it couldn't hurt for the students to learn some regional terms for, I don't know, foods or just actions, you know. There's such a wide variety.” That, I think, is also something I do.

Laurel Sutton: So for the jobs that you're talking about now, this work that you were doing while you were still employed as an academic, was the content creation all around language teaching or learning?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes.

Laurel Sutton: And has that been pretty much what you've been doing since then, or have you done other content type creation?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: No, that is mostly what I do. I create content for learning, whether it be for an in-class scenario, or on your own within an app or any kind of other materials.

Laurel Sutton: That's so interesting. This is something that basically the online learning stuff in app form did not exist (right?) 10 years ago. It's only now that it's becoming really popular. So many people are using apps that come through Babbel or Duolingo or other places. So having… So that's the next question for you is, are there a lot of linguists who are doing this? Like, do you find yourself one of several linguists on the team that you're working on, or are you the only one?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: So yes and no. So what I fin… It depends a lot. No, I mean, honestly, it really depends a little bit.

Laurel Sutton: Sure.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I know linguists who work in that area, and I've chatted with them. And we've, you know, compared notes. Currently, I work with one person who has a linguistics background, I think for a bachelor, but I don't work with him directly. Right? I work with people who — and my work right now is mostly for German — I work with people who teach German and have degrees in German, how do you call it, teaching German as a foreign language. People have teaching degrees. There are people interested in linguistics, but a PhD in linguistics I have maybe not run into, but I know that they're out there, like I said, in different companies, we're in contact, we know who we are.

Laurel Sutton: That’s great. You have a community.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Right, yes, absolutely. Trying to promote us, essentially, and our abilities.

Laurel Sutton: So let's see. So you have worked for a couple different companies. Are you finding that during the time before your current job, I think, you could work for more than one company at a time, rather than being tied to one? Is that a reasonable thing to expect?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I think you can find both. I know folks who immediately got a full-time position at one of these companies, and I know a lot of people who do sort of part-time or freelancing. I myself, I work with companies that are right now partially in the US, but not fully, so freelancing just logistically, and from I think, also, there may be some, I don't know, there may be some legal repercussions there as well, but for them, it's easier to have people who work part-time or freelance, which is also, for myself, a new adventure. So far, it's worked out. It depends a little bit, I think, depending on which company you work for, they set up their workload differently. So one company I currently work for has everything set up so you can work through, you're done at a certain point time in the future with that particular project. For others, it sort of comes a little bit at different times when there's, you know, a company who requires learning materials, you know, they say, “We want to start this class on, you know, this level of language,” then you prepare that those materials. It depends a little bit, I can't give you one straight answer.

Laurel Sutton: Sure. This is, I think, something that folks need to think about as they're coming out of academia, is that there are choices, right? Like some, as you said, some people just get hired for a full-time position, and that's what they're going to do, but for other people, it may be the case that they have several contracting gigs at the same time, and they might be the same kind of worker, they might be really different. You know, you could think that you might have partly content creation, or there might be editing, or there might be translation at three different companies.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes.

Laurel Sutton: And if you are the kind of person who can shift between those jobs, that might be a good solution. One thing that I always encourage people to think about as they're starting to imagine what their career could be like is that self-reflection to say, “How can I work to my best ability?” Some folks cannot handle the gig stuff, like it's too much to have three different jobs that you're switching between all at the same time, so if that's your personality and your work style, that's not going to be a good choice for you. Other folks really like it because it gives them a lot of flexibility, and they're not tied down to a 9 to 5 or a 10 to 6 kind of job. So there are lots of options out there for people, and folks shouldn't think that there's just going to be one path. And you might switch between them for a while. You might have a full-time gig and then do contracting for a while, and that's all perfectly okay.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Mm-hmm. Yes, absolutely. I agree with you. And as you were saying this, I was going back in my mind to the question that you had earlier about what I did at work and, you know, as a faculty member that sort of prepared me for this. I think work as a faculty member, even if you've just done it for a very short time, prepares you to switch from one project to the next. I mean, you have to teach multiple classes, you have mentoring students, you have committee meetings, you have research, you have papers, you have papers to review, papers to write. I think that, now that I think about it, prepared me quite well for it. I don't find it difficult to shift from one to the next. But then again, as you said, that is me, you know, and other people may have other, you know, other things that they're that they're exceedingly good at. I just, I find it also invigorating to a certain extent, and it keeps my you know, it keeps me going.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah. Yeah, like you like things that are maybe a little unexpected, or just a variety of tasks. And again, that's all self-reflection for anybody who's thinking about getting a job is just figuring out, and part of the journey to is trying different things, because you might think you don't like 9 to 5 gig and then you get it and actually the work is super interesting and you love it, but sometimes you don't know until you try it. And again, that's okay. You don't have to know everything just as you're starting out. You'll always find out things as you go through your work life.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes, I absolutely agree. And thinking back of the people I've met, linguists out who taken the career path, I can only second that because you have, you know, people who are wonderfully happy in the work that they do, and they realized a bit how they were prepared for it and why they're good at this particular job, irrespective of the job that it is, you know.

Laurel Sutton: So for the jobs that you've had so far, how did you get those jobs? So was it a matter of networking or looking around, or was it the community that helped you? Is there a thread there?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Let me think for a second. Yes and no, it wasn't… I didn't get those positions through networking, I don't think. I applied for all of them and went through the quote-unquote “usual process.”

Laurel Sutton: How did you find out about them, though?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I'm on LinkedIn.

Laurel Sutton: Okay.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: And I am on several other sites, Indeed.com, for example. There's one specifically for Europe that's maybe also in the U.S. I don't know. It's called Glassdoor. And I always used the LINGUIST List as well.

Laurel Sutton: Okay. And sorry to get into the weeds here, but what kinds of like keywords were you looking for? So, you know, it's very difficult to find a job that has “linguist” in the title. There just aren't a lot of them. But there's plenty of jobs that are for linguists that are called something else. So were you searching on content creation or translation or just language proficiency?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I was, I suspect I always had a little bit, I always looked also for “linguist.” Then I would look at just simply a particular language. I would look at content creation. I would look at editing. I didn't look too much at translation. And then I sort of went and kept on clicking. I know that sounds silly, but you know, you sort of, you know, you have informational interviews with people, then you like their companies, you follow their company, then you see what other people have liked that company. LinkedIn is very good for that in terms… And I think that sort of led me through it. So I can't say that it was a particular word search that got me there. I just kept on looking and looking and looking, and very often I would just cast aside job descriptions that were nothing, but then again, they may have led me by clicking to something else. LINGUIST List is good because it may also have, especially for people just starting out, they have practica. You can get part-time gigs. You can do, if you have experience in data processing, they're looking for those specifically for linguists. So if you're uncertain about the jobs that you can do as a linguist, that is a good site because by now a lot of, a good number of companies who are looking with people with a background in linguistics figured out that there's LINGUIST List, and then, you know, then they put their job ads out. So it's not just for faculty positions anymore or, you know, conferences and things like that.

Laurel Sutton: That's really great. We haven't talked much about LINGUIST List, and I think there's been a huge shift because as you were saying, I think in like the last even five years, the number of industry jobs has really increased. It used to be all faculty stuff. I can remember looking like 15 years ago and it was just faculty stuff, but that's changing a lot because the landscape is changing so much. The positions in academia are really few and far between, but the job opportunities for linguists in industry has just grown and grown and grown.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes. And I think those linguists who are, have reached a certain level in the companies where, you know, you can put your word in and say, “Okay, maybe we should be looking for linguists for this job.” They're the ones promoting them and putting them also on places like LINGUIST List, or they're promoting them and using the network that they have, you know, to spread the word, essentially.

Laurel Sutton: That's an excellent point.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: [unclear 23:48]

Laurel Sutton: Yeah. Yeah. It feels like all of us linguists who are out in industry have this moral responsibility to hire more linguists.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: And I think if you have somebody working with you who was trained as a linguist, I think there's a certain understanding, like a commonality that sort of helps in collaboration and in work environment and things like that.

Laurel Sutton: Absolutely. I am curious as to perhaps the attitude towards industry work, and you, just speak to whatever your experience is. Because we've heard from other people that in academia, especially at the larger, like R1-type institutions, there's a real disdain for industry work, and the feeling is sort of like, “You should be getting an academic job. And if you don't, that's your fault, and maybe you will get a great job doing something cool like data entry or neurolinguistics or whatever, but that's kind of a consolation prize.” Did you ever encounter that feeling from other folks or from any of the departments that you've been through, either at Penn or at Shepherd?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Definitely not at Shepherd, and at Penn State… I have to think. I don't know that anybody would say anything explicitly. I think it was understood that you went with a PhD, you would go in into academia. If you left with a master for whatever reason — I know a lot of folks who did a master and then went out on their own — there was some difficulty in understanding for some faculty, but I wouldn't say for everybody. I wouldn't, never say that. I think it depended a little bit. And I think if you're in the department, maybe there's some other pressures as a faculty member, you know, so I don't want to judge anybody. But I do know a lot of people who left at that point. At Shepherd, not at all, and once I sort of went out there talking to people, just networking without looking for a job, just networking, there were a lot of people who completely understood it. And even to this day, sometimes some colleagues will email me and say, “You know, I think that's a great thing that you do.” And some will ask me to help them with their students, because I think most of us realize that as much as we love linguistics, and we all love linguistics, as much as we'd like to do research, there's so many good things about academic work, you know. I think most of us are sort of realistic in the sense that you have to open yourself and your students up to life outside of academia, and you have to prepare them for it. That is more the tenor of what I've been hearing in the last five years. You know, people who don't necessarily want to leave academia at all, who are quite happy, but who see that just looking at the jobs out there, you have to be realistic, right?

Laurel Sutton: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: So, and you would do a disservice to your students.

Laurel Sutton: That is exactly right. The responsibility that the faculty should have for preparing your students for the real world, right? I mean, if there aren't any positions, there's no use in holding back or not encouraging them to explore the careers that may be waiting for them. I think that's partly why having you as a formal faculty person, you know, we wanted to kind of get a perspective from someone who's been through this, who's had students, and it sounds like with your students, this would have been something you talked to them about and not said, “You must do academia or else.”

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: No, I mean, at Shepherd, you know, it's an undergrad, mostly undergrad institution. Now, we do have a bunch of master's programs that has happened, much of that during my tenure there. So the conversation of what students do after graduation is a very common one. And I, although there were those who I happily, happily supported to go on for master programs or even PhD programs, you know, most people are maybe not looking for it. And I'm, with my background and really my upbringing, I don't, far from me to judge anybody who wanted to do something else. So, you know, I just tried to support my students where they were and what they wanted to do. If they said, “I really love this,” whether it be literature, linguistics, or culture, whatever it is that they wanted to do, I said, “I'd be very happy to support you. I will happily write a letter for you or letters for you,” but if they said, “You know, I'm looking for a position here and there. How can I use my Spanish BA for that?” I was very happy to support them there. I think it may be different for some of my colleagues who are in R1, R2 institutions, but you know, again, I don't know everybody, but the ones that I do know, I would think they're quite supportive.

Laurel Sutton: Well, that's great. That's wonderful to hear. So let's talk a bit about what you're doing right now. So are you employed at one place full-time? Are you still balancing gigs?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I'm balancing gigs right now, but that's totally okay for me right now, I decided, and that might be an idea for one or the other person, I decided to give myself about a year, and I left academia in December, a year to explore and to learn. And right now I'm learning a lot. Obviously this is not something I hope to do for the next 10 years. I would like a full-time position. But where I am, I'm very pleased, and like I said, I learn a lot. I learn new things. I learn new things about myself. And that can only be beneficial.

Laurel Sutton: For the companies that you've been working for as a contractor, does it feel like there might be a path to a full-time position?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: That is actually something I'm looking to explore right now. I'm sort of feeling out the dynamics of those companies, the people, the atmosphere, which to me is very important. And if there is, I would happily take it.

Laurel Sutton: And what do you see for yourself going forward? So you mentioned wanting to have a full-time position course. That would be great. The benefits are really nice to have. We all love health insurance and things like that. So… Where do… What an interview question. Where do you see yourself in five years? What do you hope for?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I would hope in five years to have a position where I can be, how do I want to put it, where I can be active, where I have a certain amount of responsibility, and where I can design where we go forward in whatever position I'm in. So to give you a concrete example, I would like to be able to head, for example, a group of folks who do content creation, see myself doing some editing, which is something as an academic you do all the time, and sort of help create and look forward to the plans for that company to offer different kinds of classes or to change the online content, that sort of thing. I think based on my experience right now, maybe in five years I'm in a completely different place. You never know that, but the question didn't ask that, so that, I think I could see myself doing.

Laurel Sutton: Okay. So moving into more of a maybe managerial or leadership-type position.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yeah.

Laurel Sutton: That's awesome. Are there any companies that you particularly want to work for or that you have, with your previous employment, that you want to call out and say to our listeners, like, “Hey, maybe you want to work for this company?”

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I really don’t. I haven't really made that much experience. So I would say that if you're interested in content creation for a particular language, I would say that you can work or apply for any of the larger companies out there doing this sort of thing. And you can start with a smaller job, or if they're looking for a particular person with more experience, depending on where you are in your career, you can apply to those. There's nobody I would say that I wouldn't work there for, and everyone I've worked for have been a good experience. So if this is sort of work that you find interesting, let me know. I can give you a few names of people who are at a different company but in the same line of work, and you can just ask us, and at that point we may have more information. But right now, that's all I can say.

Laurel Sutton: We could drop some big names that are out there. Obviously, Duolingo is one, Babbel is another, Mango is another, Appen is another one. There's probably some I'm missing here. Do you know others?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes, I currently work for Education First, which is more of a European-run venture, although they are in the U.S. as well. They do a very interesting, I'm trying to think, I think they have been around for quite some time, and the language is now also online in online classes, but they also do live classes, international travel, immersion. It's a wide, wide spectrum. So I find that interesting in the sense that they do multiple things, and they've done it very successfully for a large, long time. Other companies, the ones that you mentioned, they're young, and they're vibrant and fun, and yeah, if that's your thing, just try it. Tell them what you can do. I mean, really, it sounds easy and so difficult at the same time, but that's what I've been doing. Honestly, that's what I've been doing. I just send my materials, and if I get an interview, I give it my best, and you know…

Laurel Sutton: That's great. I’m so glad that you said that. Again, I think for people coming out of academia, there's sometimes the reluctance to try things because of the fear of failure, right? Because it's different when you're in academia. A lot of times you only get one shot at something or if you fail at a thing, it's very bad. You don't pass this test, or you write a paper that doesn't get a good grade, or you get refused for a presentation somewhere, and that one thing can really change the trajectory of your career. Whereas in business, the approach is far different. It's try lots of things. And sure, you're going to fail at lots of things, but that doesn't make you a failure. It just means you try more things and you keep trying until you find the thing that's right for you, and nobody cares. No one cares how many jobs you've applied for and didn't get.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes. And I think that, I'm very happy you made that point because I think that is something you underestimate when you come from academia. Right? Because as you said, there's so much sort of focus and also pressure on what you do, and how you do it, and how it reflects in your work, and the community and whatnot. I don't find that at all in the public or the career sector. It's, “Oh, you've done this? Okay, great. Can you do this sort of thing?” It's fine if you don't get a job. You can apply at the same company again for a different position. It's shocking, but it's true.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah, exactly.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: They're very forgiving. The entire sphere is very forgiving of those things, and it's okay to try.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah. Yeah, that's great. I'm glad you mentioned that as well. It's really a mind shift that you have to get yourself into when you're doing this, when you're making a decision that you're going to be in industry. But after a while, I think most people get used to it pretty quickly, and then once you've been doing it for a while, you're like, “Oh, yeah, this is just the way it is. It's okay,” and it doesn't feel strange or make you have self-doubt because you applied for 10 jobs and you only heard back from 3 of them, because that's fine. You just keep applying for more jobs.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: And I think maybe a good thing of first of having been in academia and having gone through that process is that you're more forgiving of yourself and you learn with the situation. I think the other way around may be harder. So you go from a very structured atmosphere into one where it's okay. It's okay. And everybody knows that. It's like a common denominator.

Laurel Sutton: I'm really glad we got to talk about that. I feel like in terms of preparing oneself for going out into the world, there's not quite enough talk about what is happening emotionally and how you view yourself, because academia can be a weird place. It's very artificial in some ways, and you have to recognize that and think about the kind of person you want to be and how you want to be perceived in the business world. And as they often say, you might have to project that for a while because you don't really feel it, but you will feel it eventually. But I have just heard stories from people and have met with so many people who kind of, they’re taking their academic persona into the world, and that tends to be very “I'm not good enough” or imposter syndrome stuff and kind of downplaying your skills because you don't think you're as good as you are. And that is just something that everybody has to address in their own way to really say, “Yeah, I can do this. Of course I can do this. I have great skills. I'm a linguist. I went to school for it. I know all this really cool stuff.”

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes, absolutely true. I do have to say that talking of that process of letting go, if you will, it's okay if you're sad about leaving linguistics. It's okay to be sad about thinking, “Oh, I'm not going to be discussing the newest research on this and that.” Because you still can read. Nobody's stopping you from reading the articles and the books and to discuss it with your colleagues and friends.

Laurel Sutton: Yes, absolutely.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: But I think there is a process, a little bit of letting go and that is very individual, I would think for every person. Some people are fine with it. They're like, “Oh, I'm done,” and the other ones, there's a certain lingering of it. And whatever it is that applies to you, it's okay. Just let it be there. It will work itself out. Just be patient with yourself, just like you're patient with yourself in doing your master's thesis or PhD thesis or whatever it is that you're doing, be patient with yourself there too.

Laurel Sutton: That's great. What a great piece of advice. Thank you so much for saying that. That's awesome. Speaking of advice, is there any other advice that we haven't discussed so far that you'd like to put out there for folks who are thinking of going into business?

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Let me think. I would say that one of the, I think I may think of it in a different way. One of the pieces of advice that I would have given myself two years ago is just, don't be afraid to talk to people. There's a certain hesitancy. Maybe that's my personal hesitancy or something I picked up. I don't know. I couldn't tell you. But how can I just talk to this person? You can. And you'd be surprised how willing they are to help you and to chat. Really, “informational interviews” sounds like something so formal, and then you're thinking back to the interview trainings you had. If you're looking for academic job and it's a nightmare, you're pulling your hair out. It's really not stressful. You contact people and they'll tell you if they have time or if they don't. And if they don't, it's not a personal offense. They may just be too busy. And if they do, just prepare a few questions, odds are they've done one before and they can guide you a little bit. Don't be afraid to reach out to people. That would be my…

Laurel Sutton: Calling it an informational interview covers a lot of ground. Right? It can range from something more structured where someone's kind of ticking off answers to questions, but it can just be, well, in the pre-COVID days, “Can we have coffee and you tell me about your job for 20 minutes?”

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes. Exactly.

Laurel Sutton: That's an informational interview. And if you buy that person a coffee, they will be more than happy to sit down and tell you about their job for 20 minutes. And I think you're absolutely right. Most everybody is really happy. And I would say, too, as you just said, if you contact someone and they say they're too busy, maybe they're too busy now. Maybe in two months they won't be too busy, so try again. If they say, “Hit me up later on. I'm just in the middle of stuff right now,” it's not you. It's just that they want to give you the time that's required and they just don't have it right now.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: Yes. And if you run into a linguist who's out there, it's totally fine to start off first five minutes, “So what did you do as a linguist?” Sort of a little bonding experience there. And they'd be happy to tell you how they use their linguistics training at work, which I think is probably one of the key questions. If you do interview a linguist, how is, just to sort of run it through your head, what are they doing and how can I do this?

Laurel Sutton: Yeah. I mean, really, find a linguist who doesn't want to talk about linguistics. I don't think you can.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I would agree.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah. That's awesome. Well, I think we've covered just about everything that I've wanted to talk about. You have provided such an amazing perspective. Thank you so much for coming on and chatting. And maybe later on, if you do end up getting a full-time position, we can come back and revisit some of these things and you can talk about how things are different from the gig economy to the full-time position.

Eva-María Suárez Büdenbender: I'd love to do that. Thank you very much for the opportunity. It was a lot of fun doing this. And like I said, if anybody has any questions, feel free to contact me.

Laurel Sutton: Wonderful.

Linguistics Career Launch 2021 was a one-month intensive program intended to familiarize linguistic students and faculty with career options beyond academia, in business, tech, government, and nonprofit organizations. Videos of all our recorded sessions are available on our YouTube channel. LCL was organized by Nancy Frishberg, Alexandra Johnston, Emily Pace, Susan Steele, and Laurel Sutton. You can get in touch at linguisticscareerlaunch@gmail.com. The music is Neptunea by Scanglobe and is licensed under Creative Commons. Podcast production by Gregory Gray at Tuatara Design.