Notes on Linguistic Style[1]

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Abstract

This manuscript presents general style guidelines for linguistic writing. These include recommendations for general structure of linguistics papers, and common style guides to consult. Also included are linguistics-specific conventions for dealing with citations, notes, in-line examples and numbered examples. The manuscript is formatted following its own recommendations to reinforce their presentational motivations and to demonstrate their use.

1. Overview and introduction

This is a guide for students who have limited experience with academic writing in linguistics. The advice here is mostly applicable for work that is expected to generate commentary, e.g. class papers and research reports. Such writing is presented in a readable form with plenty of space for written comments. Good organization and proofreading ensure the reader can get at the content of your work.

For coursework, it is typically more important to apply a style *consistently* than to use a particular style. In linguistics, the APA manual (American Psychological Association, 2001) and the MLA handbook (Modern Language Association, 1999) are the most common general guides. Style guides specify things like heading and reference style, how footnotes or endnotes are to

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[1] This document is for the benefit of my students who may have limited experience with academic writing in North American linguistics. I have tried to follow my own advice as much as possible in creating it, so it is both visually and verbally descriptive of 'standard' style. All the references in this document are real, although claims made about them are mostly fiction.

[2] Version history: Version 1.0 released 10 November 2003. Version 1.1 added this history; made footnote text smaller, changed footnote paragraph formatting; added abstract, added heading numbers, and made sundry changes to the text. Version 1.2 was re-created from a backup after I accidentally saved over Version 1.1, and made sundry corrections to text and footnoting.

be handled, etc. Throughout this text, it is assumed the writer is expecting 'casual review', i.e. by an instructor or colleague(s). Formal manuscripts intended for publication may require strict adherence to a style guide specified by the editor or journal, which naturally supersede the general guidelines offered here.

This document presents some basic, 'common sense', style issues encountered in linguistic writing, and guidelines for handling them. It will begin with general recommendations regarding organizations, followed by a discussion of specific issues encountered in linguistic writing such has handling numbered examples, and in-line references to linguistic data.

2. General structure

Scholarly writing should always be typewritten or word-processed. Unless otherwise directed, it is best to:

- Type main text using double spacing (block material may be single spaced)
- Use at least 1-inch margins all around
- Use at least 12-point type
- Indent the first line of paragraphs
- Print/type only one side of each page
- Number pages consecutively

These ensure the legibility of your text, with plenty of space between lines and in margins to mark typos or other make other notations, and leaving space on the backs of pages for longer commentary. If possible, number pages in a header or footer, and include your name and/or a short running title. This ensures the pages can't accidentally get put in the wrong order and cause confusion.

Linguistic writing tends to follow the social sciences (particularly psychology) rather than the humanities. Humanistic writing is often conversational or narrative in structure,

starting and point A and guiding the reader to point B. (Social) science writing is more analytic. The basic formula is "this is what I'm going to tell you, this is what I'm telling you, and this is what I told you." Start with an introduction that lays out the problem to be addressed and the way it will be handled. Present the problem and handle it. Then conclude by summarizing the paper.

Each section may be given a separate heading (e.g. Introduction or Background, Present Analysis, Conclusion or Summary) or not, depending on the length or complexity of the work. If sub-sections are necessary in the body, probably headings are called for. Headings and sections may be numbered in 'legal outline' style (1, 1.1, 1.2, 2, etc.), particularly if there is a need to cross-reference by section. If cross-referencing is used, refer to the title of the section (as in *see 'Conclusions'*) or the section number, if using (e.g. *see sections 2.2.1 through 2.2.4*).

Examples set off from the text are numbered throughout the document for easy cross-referencing (see 3.2 Numbered block examples, below). If included, figures and tables are usually numbered separately (from each other and from examples), and consecutively (figure 1, figure 2, table 1, table 2, etc.) When writing for classes, or for 'casual review', it is best to leave tables and figures (like examples) in their appropriate places within the text of a document.[3]

The use of references is critical in scholarly writing. Using ideas, analyses, data, and even terminology (until it passes into 'general use' in the relevant literature), from any source other than your own head must be credited appropriately, or it is plagiarism. For formal lists of references at the ends of papers, refer to the favoured style guide for formatting. For in-line

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3 In publishing, it is common to be required to remove tables and figures from the main body of a manuscript, with notations such as "FIGURE FOUR PLACED ABOUT HERE" in their place. Always check with the relevant editors' style requirements.

citations, linguists usually follow the Author-Date style, where in a *work* is referred to by the author's last name followed by the year of publication. It is sometimes acceptable to refer to the work of an *author*, citing only the year of publication immediately after the author. In example (1), reference is made to "Chomsky & Halle", as a joint *author* of a specific proposal (the 1968 volume *Sound Pattern of English*, (Chomsky & Halle, 1986)), and to the *work* published by Steriade in 1995 (Steriade, 1995).

1   ... features are two-valued, or binary, as proposed by Chomsky & Halle (1968), with certain exceptions for privative features, such as [nasal] or [round] (Steriade 1995).

3. Handling Examples

3.1 Citing linguistic examples in text

When referring to linguistic forms as examples in text, they should be set off from 'normal' text clearly. Italics[4] is preferred for in-line examples of linguistic forms (typically in orthography) as in (2a), followed by a gloss in single quotes when necessary (2b).

2 a. For instance, traditional forms like *eavestrough* and *zed* are giving way to Americanisms like *gutter* and *zee*.

     b. Some forms apparently result from contact with French-speaking traders, such as *ləpəskʷi* 'hardtack' and *balyi* 'wedding' (from French *le biscuit* and *(se) marier*, respectively).

When citing phonetic, phonological, or orthographic symbols or transcriptions (as opposed to linguistic forms they represent), appropriate brackets are used. Italics are not required for bracketed material. Angled brackets set off orthographic letters, i.e. <e>, <č>, square brackets are used for phonetic symbols and transcriptions, i.e. [ə], [ʔɛːdʲi], and slashes for phonemic symbols or representations, i.e. /a/, /edi/. Be consistent in using symbols, and

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4 In the days of typewriters, italics were not an option, and underscoring in a typescript was universally understood as a direction to the typesetter to set the text in italics. It is best not to use underscoring and italics contrastively for any purpose, as most style guides still assume that they mean the same thing. Similarly typewritten ALL CAPS was always reset as SMALL CAPS for readability. Best to avoid contrasting them.

where necessary make sure the appropriate 'system' of transcription is indicated. Example (3)

is a passage exemplifying reference to orthographic characters, linguistic forms, and

transcriptions, each set off with appropriate formatting or brackets.

> 3   Douglas Taylor (Taylor, 1977) writes <o> for the back, high, unround vowel
>   (IPA [u]). High vowels [i] and [u] are analyzed as identical to the cognate
>   glides [j] and [w], and all are written with <i> and <u> only. Thus Taylor's
>   *uobo* 'rock', is pronounced [wuubu]. Current sources prefer *wübü*
>   (Cayetano, 1993).

3.2 Numbered block examples

Examples set off from the text by spacing, i.e. any example which is not written in-line,

should be set off by a full line-space above and below, and should be indented from the left

margin. Like block quotes and references, block examples can usually be single spaced, since

data is usually just data and doesn't warrant a lot of commentary on the part of your reader.

For visual clarity, an extra space may be left between examples. Consider this especially when

your examples take up more than one line (see 3.3 Interlinears, below). Italics are not generally

necessary if the data is set off from the text in this manner, unless data and glosses are to be

mixed in unusual ways.

To make cross-references easier, examples should be numbered consecutively

throughout the paper. In linguistics, it is typical to place numbers indented from the left

margin. Number style (in parentheses or not, or whatever) is usually specified in style sheets,

but again consistency is probably more important than anything else.

Even if you won't be doing a lot of extra cross-referencing, it is best to make a specific

reference to any numbered item (example, figure or table) somewhere in the text, rather than

leaving examples or other material 'hanging' with no specific point in the text to tie them to.

See example (4).

4   … as in (15a-c) below.

    15 a.   The chef peppered the meat.
          b.   The chef peppered the meat pink peppercorns.
          c.   The chef peppered the meat with sea salt.

Avoid allowing block items (examples, quotes, tables, figures) to break across pages if at all possible

3.3 Interlinears

Interlinears (interlinear translations) are often used in papers involving the analysis of texts, or in place of more elaborate examples involving trees or similar graphical images. Depending on the language being cited and the needs of the author (and requirements of the editor/publisher) there may be as many as five lines to an interlinear, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Elements in an interlinear translation

Line	Content	Notes
i	Orthography	Use particularly if the symbols or script used is different than in the Parse (optional)
ii	Intermediate Representation	May be based on Orthography, "undoes" things in orthography that obscure elements under discussion in the Parse (optional)
iii	Parse	A morpheme-by-morpheme representation of the data, divided by marked boundaries (required)
iv	Gloss	A translation of each morpheme indicated in the Parse, divided by the same marked boundaries (required)
v	Free Translation	A meaningful translation of the whole utterance (optional)

Which lines are needed (other than the parse and gloss lines) will depend on the needs of the author. Some authors or editors may prefer a different order to some of these elements, depending on the purpose of the work (or house style). Examples of different kinds of interlinears are presented in (5) and (6). (Roman numerals to the right are given only for reference to the list in Table 1.)

5   Onahati tibugayan garada lun numari   (i)
       arunaha-ti t-ibugayan garada l-un n-umari   (ii/iii)
       send-3mS 3fPOS-sibling letter 3ma-dat 1sPOS-husband   (iv)
       'her brother sent a letter to my husband'   (v)

6   ʔu-čal(a)-t-d   =čəxʷ   t(-s-)i   bədaʔ-s   (i/ii/iii)
       CMP-chase-TR-3SO   =2SS   DEM.PRX.(-FEM-)   child-3POS   (iv)
       'you (sg) chased its/their daughter'   (v)

Interlinears may be lined up along word or phrase boundaries (as in 6), or left alone (5). In either case it is imperative that the same number of boundaries (spaces, hyphens, etc.) appear in the parse as in the gloss, and in the same order (except when such is impossible, as with infixes). Spaces denote word boundaries, and hyphens (<->) mark morpheme boundaries. Other boundary types or distinctions may be introduced when necessary. If a gloss would normally involve a space or hyphen (i.e. is phrasal or hyphenated), the space or hyphen should be replaced with a neutral symbol, such as a period (<.>) or colon (<:>).

7   dara
      be:good

8   pichingu
      corn.husk.doll

9   ... chercher   du   vin
      ... look.for   INDEF:MASS.MASC.SG   wine

Grammatical abbreviations may be set in all caps, small caps, or lower case, depending on the needs of the author—either all cap(ital)s or no caps for general purposes, or in cases where you want to draw the reader's attention to particular morphemes (if your paper is about person markers, or reflexes of the 'ezafe' morpheme or something), use caps to gloss only the 'special' morphemes.[5]

Conventions for dealing with infixes, or other boundary types (i.e. intonational phrase boundaries, + and # morpheme boundaries, or any other symbol used to separate elements in the parse and gloss) should be established clearly on their first use, or at the beginning of the

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5 In traditional typesetting, things set in ALL CAPS are usually reset as SMALL CAPS. Do not mix ALL CAPS and SMALL CAPS in the same document, and never use them contrastively if it can be avoided.

paper, unless following some well-established tradition (e.g. <=> is commonly used as a clitic boundary, and <√> is sometimes used to mark the left edge of a root). If more than two of your references do something without comment, go ahead and follow suit, but if they don't, you'd better comment on it. Abbreviations likewise should be clearly spelled out somewhere, i.e. in a list at the front of the thesis/book, in the first footnote of an article, in a note attached to the first instance of a special abbreviation, or in an appendix. Group like symbols together (boundaries, grammatical abbreviations, person markers), alphabetized or ordered as appropriate. Example (10) illustrates such a list for the examples in (5) and (6).

10   List of symbols and abbreviations

-	morpheme boundary	1sPOS	1st sg. possessor
=	clitic boundary	1ps	1st pl. subject
CMP	completive aspect	2ss	2nd masc. sing.
DAT	dative	3so	3rd sg. object
DEM	demonstrative	3POS	3rd person possessor
FEM	feminine	3fPOS	3rd fem. sing. possessor
PRX	proximate	3mA	3rd masc. obj. of adposition
TR	transitive suffix		

4. Last words

The above advice will get you through most class work, although you will want to check with professors about preferred styles (if they have any), and also about things like title pages.[6] Always include your name, the date, the class the paper was written for, and any other general information required (like assignment number or title) whether on a separate title page or just at the top of the first page. Double space your text leaving at least 1-inch margins, and use 12-point type. Number pages throughout the document and type/print on only one side of each sheet. Keep a copy of anything you submit for review or evaluation.

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6 Personally, I hate title pages. What an incredible waste of paper! For the record, I really hate footnotes too. If it's important enough to say at all, try to say it in the body of the text. If it's not that important, consider leaving it out. The only good time to use a footnote is when an editor or reviewer insists you comment on something, but there's no other good way to get it into the body of your text. Personal opinion.

If you can manage it, try to put some author/title information in the footer of each page, along with page numbers, just in case the pages get mixed up with other things. Headers/footers are also handy places to put dire warnings such as "DRAFT – please do not quote", "comments welcome", "to be submitted to *Language*" or whatever you may want your readers to know.

References

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