Some Guidelines for Writing Linguistics Papers

By Fritz Newmeyer

1.   **STRIVE FOR CLARITY**. Be clear! A technical linguistics paper is not a mystery story -- there should never be any surprises. Say what your conclusion is going to be at the beginning of the paper with a few words on how you plan to get to the conclusion. A good typical opening for a paper is something like:

In this paper, I will argue that a voiced segment must be bound in its governing category. This conclusion challenges previous work by Kenstowicz (1983) and Postal (1987), who maintain that such segments are invisible to all syntactic constraints. My argument will take the following form. In section 2, I will show that [d] and [o] are 'alpha-emitters', and thus free in COMP. In section 3, I will establish that being free in COMP entails the property of counterjunctive trijacency (CT). Section 4, shows how, given the natural assumption that CT is sigma-sensitive, the effect of being subject to CT and that of being bound in one's governing category are notational variants. The final section, section 5, generalizes [d] and [o] to all voiced segments and speculates on the implications of the general findings in this paper for Gricean implicature.

Summarize in an analogous fashion at the end. In fact, the first paragraph of a paper and the last can be virtually identical. Each section should be like a mini-paper in itself, previewing what will be said and summarizing at the end.

Your paper should be peppered with phrases like *I will now argue..., As we have seen...,* etc. Anything to baby the reader is fine!

Almost all papers refer to the work of others, either to adopt or to challenge some principle proposed elsewhere. That's fine, of course, but it is absolutely essential that the reader understand whether a particular point is your own contribution or whether it is that of the author being cited. It is surprising how easy it is to confuse the reader, if you present someone else's idea in one paragraph and discuss the idea in the next, without saying at the beginning of the second paragraph if you are continuing to present the other author's ideas or are beginning to challenge them.

Avoid using deictic *this* as in all-too-common passages like ***This*** *suggests that we must abandon the UCP*. Invariably there is more than one potential antecedent for *this*. Write instead: *The failure of coreference to hold between the subject and the object trace in sentence (89) suggests that we must abandon the UCP.*

2.   **EXAMPLES.** The reader should never be in doubt as to the relevance of a particular example and should know why it is being given *before* reading it. In other words, as the reader

encounters an example or set of examples, they should already know what to be looking for. They shouldn't have to wait until after reading the examples to find out why they are there.

It should be clear when you give an example whether you thought of the example yourself or if you are citing somebody else's example.

Never break up a sentence of text with an example. Examples should follow a full sentence of text, which should end in a colon.

An example in the text itself should be in italics (or underlined) followed by the gloss, if necessary, in quotation marks. For example: The German word *Buch* 'book' is neuter.

NONENGLISH EXAMPLES. Examples from other languages should consist of (1) The sentence itself; (2) A word-for-word or morpheme-for-morpheme translation, containing the *relevant* grammatical information; (3) The actual translation:

der	Mann	der	Bohnen	gegessen	hat
the	man	who	beans	eaten	has
(masc.	(masc.				
nom. sg.)	nom. sg.)				

'the man who ate beans'

3.   IN-TEXT CITATIONS. Use the author-date format: *Chomsky (1981) and Lakoff (1983) agree that language exists.* Use small letters after the date if there is more than one reference per year for any author, as in *Chomsky (1963a)*.

If you are giving a direct quotation, you *must* use quotation marks, and put the author, date, and *page number*after the quotation. It's the law! Also, it's not enough to change a word here or

there in a quotation and decide that you now don't need to use quotation marks. In fact, you still do. But there is *very rarely* any reason to put a direct quote in a paper. It is always much better to paraphrase the material that you want to cite in your own words. Even so, you still have to give a citation to the author you are paraphrasing.

4.   FOOTNOTES.   Footnotes should always be contentful. Something like *See Selkirk (1980)* belongs in the main text, not in a footnote. Footnotes are normally reserved for little bits of extra clarification or material for further thought that would be digressions if they were put in the main text.

The first footnote is often an acknowledgement. By tradition, term papers do not have acknowledgements, MA theses sometimes do, while Ph D dissertations, articles, and books invariably do. However, if you rely heavily on an individual for *data*, even in a term paper, there should be an acknowledgement to that effect.

5.   REFERENCES. There is no single agreed upon format for references in the bibliography -- just copy a format from a journal article if you are unsure. But make sure that you include page numbers for articles and publisher and city for books.

After you have finished the paper, make sure that every paper or book that you cited in the main text has a reference in the reference list.

6.   **PERSON, NUMBER, AND VOICE**. It is best to write in the first person singular: *I will argue that....* Personally, I find the first person plural very pompous sounding: (e.g. *We will argue that...*).

Above all, avoid the agentless passive construction. Never use phraseology like *It has been argued that* ... You would be amazed how often it is really not clear *who* has done the arguing.

7.   THE ONLY "PROOFS" ARE IN MATHEMATICAL LINGUISTICS. You should avoid using the word *prove* as in *I will prove in this paper that tense has its own maximal projection.* Proofs are attributes of deductive systems, not empirical science. It is much better to use instead expressions such as *attempt to establish*, *argueconvincingly*, *suggest*, and so on.