

# How to Write a Linguistics Term Paper

## 1 The Structure of the Term paper

Please note that this document describes the structures of an **empirical** term paper in linguistics. If you want to write a **theoretical** paper, the structure will be different. Please contact your instructor for more information.

### Outline of the Paper

Your paper should contain the following parts:

- Cover sheet
- Table of contents
- (Table of figures)<sup>1</sup>
- Introduction
- Sections (e.g. theoretical background, methodology, etc.)
- Conclusion
- List of references
- (Appendix)
- Affidavit

You can find more information on the respective sections below. The cover sheet, table of contents and the list of references will be explained in more detail in *2 Formatting and Layout* and *3 Citation Methods and Bibliographical References* below.

The main text of a typical paper is structured as follows.

### *Introduction*

One of the most important functions of the introduction is to get the reader interested in the topic. A good way to do this is to present examples of the phenomenon you are studying in your term paper very early on (perhaps even at the very beginning, after saying “Consider examples (1) - (3):”). Explain the phenomenon you are investigating and introduce the research question(s). This has to be embedded in the context of existing research, e.g.: Is there a question that remained unanswered in previous studies? In how far does your study extend or replicate previous research? Finally, you can give an overview of the structure of your paper, to guide the reader through your text.

### *Theoretical Background*

The theoretical background section of your term paper provides an overview of the literature and terminology relevant for your research question. More precisely, you need to give definitions of the phenomenon/phenomena you are investigating and make clear which working

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<sup>1</sup> You need to include a table of figures if you have several graphs or tables in your paper.



definition you will use throughout your paper. For instance, if your term paper is about ‘non-finite complements’, you need to define this term e.g. on the basis of some academic reference grammar (for instance, *The Cambridge grammar of English language* by Huddleston & Pullum (2002) or *A comprehensive grammar of the English language* by Quirk et al. (1985)).

Furthermore it is important to discuss the literature critically. You should also make clear how your study contributes to the discussion and/or how it fills a research gap. To see how you can include sources into your texts, see below:

- According to Ellis (2002: 144), “[f]requency is [...] a key determinant of acquisition...”
  - Hoffmann (2005: 43) points out/argues/tests/shows/proves/claims/verifies/falsifies...
  - As early as 1969, Robertson developed...
  - For instance/On the other hand/In contrast/In accordance with X/Following X, Weinreich (1953) identifies this kind of second language acquisition as subordinate bilingualism.
  - Thus, according to Siyanova-Chanturia, (2015: 5), “formulaic sequences are processed (i.e. comprehended and produced) quantitatively faster ...”
- You are required to use specialised (linguistic) literature which you can find in: linguistic journals (e.g. *English Language and Linguistics*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, etc.), textbooks (e.g. for a paper in syntax: Aarts (2013): *English syntax and argumentation* or van Gelderen (2010): *An introduction to the grammar of English*), reference grammars (see above) and linguistic dictionaries (e.g. Matthews (2007): *The concise Oxford dictionary of linguistics* or Crystal (2011): *Dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*).
  - Non-academic websites (such as Wikipedia) are not acceptable sources for definitions of linguistic terminology or for an evaluation of the current state of research. Why not, you may wonder? The reason is that even though many pertinent articles may indeed be based on good scholarship, using a Wikipedia article is a bit like using a text that you have found accidentally beside a photocopying machine: You don’t really know who the author is, and there is no way you can assess the quality of the contents.

### ***Methodology***

If you are doing empirical research for your term paper, the methodology section will be one of the most important sections in your work because it will state which methods you have used to generate new ideas, concepts, or findings in this paper.

The methodology section should be written in such way that someone reading it should be able to replicate your study, and should then be able to compare his/her results with yours. Thus, together with the appendix, this section guarantees the transparency of what you are doing, one of the most essential properties of scientific research.

### *Data*

This section should include a precise description of the data you have used for your analysis. You should refer to the following pieces of information:

- Explain the type and quantity of the data used. (Why did you choose this kind of data?)
- Describe the source of your data (text corpus, questionnaire, interview etc.) and include an explanatory statement. (Why did you choose this source?)
- Description of the data source:
  - for corpora/dictionaries as data source:
    - corpus/dictionary should be briefly described/introduced
  - for questionnaires as data source:
    - The questionnaire should be introduced. The individual tasks of the questionnaire should be explained and justified (Why did you choose these tasks?)
    - Give relevant personal details of participants (age, nationality, etc.) – what is relevant may vary depending on the kind of study and the method of data collection.
- Mention problems you had while collecting the data and explain how you dealt with those problems.

### *Method*

The following aspects should be considered here:

- Data analysis: How did you process/transform the **original** data you collected? How did you analyse your data? According to which aspects/ principles /categories did you classify the data? You should justify your choices.

Note that it is highly important to give examples of your own data to clarify your procedure of analysis, i.e. while explaining your method of analysis give respective examples from your own data in order to allow for transparency of your methods.

### *Results*

In this section you will present your findings in detail and will provide examples from your data. You should typically start from general facts and then proceed to more specific/detailed sub-analyses. You can start with a very basic/general observation at the beginning such as how frequent the linguistic phenomenon is in your data.

The best way to visualise quantitative data is to use tables or graphs (include them in the text and do not hide them in the appendix). Note, however, that it is the purpose of tables and graphs to complement the text, not to replace it. Thus, you need to make reference to them, and you need to describe the most interesting/striking observations that we can see in the tables and graphs. The text should still be meaningful and coherent, even if the tables and figures are removed. Also provide examples from your data. Furthermore, you need to label your graphs

and tables: They should all have a title (or caption), and axes (graphs) or rows and columns (tables) should be given transparent and clear labels (e.g. Figure 2. Distribution of Complement Types, in %).

It is important, however, that you clearly separate the description of the empirical findings itself (e.g. the numbers and distributions) from the evaluation or interpretation of these findings (e.g. in how far they support a certain theory or hypothesis). In a larger paper, the evaluation and interpretation can be given a separate section ('Discussion', cf. below). In smaller papers, you can include the results and the discussion in a single section.

*Discussion* (if there is one, cf. above)

The discussion section is where you critically discuss your findings with regard to your research question(s). More precisely, you should show how your research question(s) can be answered by means of the results of your research project.

*Conclusion*

The conclusion should be a self-contained text and should therefore be written in a way that allows readers to understand it without having read the full paper. Also, many readers first read the introduction (and give up reading the paper if they fail to see why it is interesting) and then jump to the conclusion to check whether it is worth reading the rest. Keep this in mind when writing the conclusion! Therefore, you should mention what your term paper was about and what your research question was. Your conclusion should highlight the central points of your analysis and state the answer to your research question. Furthermore, you should argue how your results contribute to the field of study and what implications they might have.

Refer to the limits of your analysis (but don't be too negative! You need to sell your findings to the reader – and if you are too negative, they will feel frustrated) and state what could be done in future research. Furthermore, you can also place your findings in a wider linguistic context.

*List of References*

See 3 below.

*Appendix*

In your appendix, you can include e.g. the questionnaire, the spreadsheet you used to code your data, further graphs, etc. In your text, you should make references to your appendix where appropriate (e.g. "The questionnaire is provided in the appendix"). Make sure that the appendix only includes material that is non-essential for following your paper. Don't put tables/figures in the appendix that you need for things to make sense.

*Affidavit*

The affidavit is an obligatory part of your term paper. By signing it, you confirm that you have indicated any work which is not your own. This is very important because **plagiarism** has serious consequences. Plagiarism is not only handing in someone else's work as your own.

Even if you merely forget to insert a citation or reference, you commit plagiarism! You must give credit any time you make use of other people's writings or ideas in quotations, paraphrases or when simply referring to them. You will find more information on the department's policy on plagiarism at:

[www.anglistik.uni-trier.de](http://www.anglistik.uni-trier.de), s.v. 'Examinations/Prüfungen'

Therefore, at the end of your paper, you must include the following statement and sign it:

**„Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Aus fremden Quellen Übernommenes ist kenntlich gemacht.“**

[Date] [Signature]

## 2 Formatting and Layout

### *Length of paper*

The length of your paper depends on the type of the paper as well as on your study programme. For instance, BA students have to write term papers of approx. 2,500-5,000 and a BA thesis of 12,000-15,000 words. MA students have to write between 4,000-6,000 words in term papers and approx. 25,000 words in their MA thesis. If you are not sure about the requirements, look into your 'Modulhandbuch' and/or ask your instructor. The cover sheet, table of contents, tables, figures, appendix and the affidavit do not count.

### *Format*

- Use an easily legible font (e.g. Times New Roman), standard font size (12pt for running text).
- Use a 1.5 line spacing and a minimum of 2.5 cm margin to the left and right.
- Print on one side of the paper only, and number all pages, except for the cover page.

### *Cover Page and Table of Contents*

Create a **cover page** which states the following information:

- the title of your paper
- your name
- student number
- contact details
- degree program
- the title of the course
- the current semester
- the supervisor's name and affiliation (Universität Trier, FB II/Anglistik)
- the date of submission

- The **table of contents** lists all sections of your paper in sequence (Arabic numerals), with page numbers. Start page numbering with your introduction, e.g.:

1. Introduction	1
2. Simple and complex sentences	2
2.1. Simple sentences	3
2.2. Complex sentences	4
2.3. Subordination vs. coordination	6
(...)	
3. Conclusion	12
4. References	13

### *Examples*

Examples within the text should be italicized, as in: “The idiom *to spill the beans* is an abstract construction [...]”. If you use more than one example in a row they should be separated from running text and numbered consecutively as shown below:

- (1) *Mary drives John crazy.*
- (2) \**Mary drives John.*

Another option is to italicise only the relevant parts of the examples to help readers e.g.:

- (1) She enjoys *reading* books.
- (2) It started *to rain*.

Just make sure that you are consistent.

If you have an ungrammatical sentence, you use an asterisk to indicate so as in example (2) above. Other notational conventions are listed as follows:

- “Double quotation marks” are used for direct quotes.
- ‘Single quotes’ are used to express the **meaning** of a word or passage, as in translations, e.g. In German, the lexical verb *werden* ‘become’ is used to express future tense.
- **Phonemic** transcriptions are enclosed by /slashes/, e.g. /teɪk/.
- **Phonetic** transcriptions are enclosed by [square brackets], e.g. [t<sup>h</sup>eɪk].
- {Curly brackets} are used to identify **morphemes**, e.g. {writ} {-er}.
- <Angular brackets> indicate **graphemes**, use these if you want to refer explicitly to the spelling of a linguistic item, e.g.: Both <sun> and <son> are pronounced /sʌn/.

You should use double quotation marks for quotations only. It is not recommended to use quotation marks (single or double) for marking emphasis or irony.



### *Footnotes*

Footnotes are only to be used to illustrate facts or thoughts which might interrupt the line of argumentation in the running text. Different from literary studies, footnotes are not to be used for bibliographical reference.

## 3 Citation methods and bibliographical reference

### *Quotations*

Short quotations have to be put in quotation marks; quotations exceeding three lines have to be indented and set apart from the running text, with single spacing but without quotation marks. Bibliographical information – author, year, corresponding page number – has to follow the quotation in brackets, e.g. (Stubbs 2001: 24). This helps to identify the quoted work from your list of references. Use direct quotations sparingly! Bibliographical references in the running text should only include information on author, year of publication and corresponding page number (e.g. Kolbe-Hanna (2011: 194) points out...). Please keep in mind that **all cited** works must be included in your bibliography. Do not include works you have **not** cited. Sometimes, you don't have access to the original source and therefore need to quote somebody's text as it was quoted in another scholar's publication (e.g. "Tremblay 1947:25, quoted in Leech 2001:12"). In this case, both sources must be mentioned in the references section.

### *References*

The list of references should contain all cited works alphabetically ordered by surname of the author(s)/editor(s). The examples below illustrate a prototypical format for such bibliographic information as found in many linguistic publications. There are three main types of bibliographical information which differ in format but which are not separated in the list of references: monographs, articles from journals, and articles from collective volumes. The list of references should follow the conventions of the *Unified Style Sheet for Linguistics* (or similar well established conventions such as the APA style – as long as you are consistent!), illustrated in the following. A complete description can be found here:

<http://celxj.org/downloads/USS-NoComments.pdf>

*Sample reference entries (following the "Unified style sheet for linguistics")*

#### **Book (authored work):**

- Hoffmann, Sebastian, Evert, Stefan, Smith, Nicholas, Lee David YW & Ylva Berglund Prytz. 2008. *Corpus linguistics with BNCweb - a practical guide*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London, New York: Longman.
- Sand, Andrea. 1999. *Linguistic variation in Jamaica - A corpus-based study of radio and newspaper usage*. Tübingen: Narr.

**Book (edited work):**

- Gippert, Jost, Nikolaus P. Himmelmann & Ulrike Mosel (eds.). 2006. *Essentials of language documentation* (Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs 178). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Huddleston, Rodney D. & Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Contribution in an edited work:**

- Arndt-Lappe, Sabine. 2015. Word-formation and analogy. In Peter O. Müller, Ingeborg Ohnheiser, Susan Olsen, Franz Rainer (eds), *Word-formation. An international handbook of the languages of Europe*, Vol. 2. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 822-841.
- Kolbe-Hanna, Daniela & Benedikt Szmrecsanyi. 2015. Grammatical variation. In Douglas Biber & Randi Reppen (eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of English corpus linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 161-179.

→ **Note: Entries for articles in edited works should always include full bibliographical information for the edited work. Abbreviating the entry (e.g., with “In Müller et al., 822-841”) is not acceptable.**

**Book also published electronically:**

- Hoffmann, Sebastian, Andrea Sand & Sabine Arndt-Lappe (eds.). 2017. Exploring recent diachrony: Corpus studies of lexicogrammar and language practices in Late Modern English. *Studies in Variation, Contact and Change in English*, Vol. 18. Helsinki: VARIENG. <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/series/volumes/18/index.html>. (accessed 1 June 2017).

→ **Note: Publication date = year of online publication or year of the latest update. The date on which the URL was accessed should be provided in parentheses at the end of the entry.**

**Journal article:**

- Arndt-Lappe, Sabine & Ingo Plag. 2013. The role of prosodic structure in the formation of English blends. *English Language and Linguistics* 17(3). 537-563.
- Ellis, Nick C. 2002. Frequency effects in language processing: A review with implications for theories of implicit and explicit language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 24(02). 143–188.
- Gabrielatos, Costas, Torgersen, Eivind Nessa, Hoffmann, Sebastian & Susan Fox. 2010. A corpus-based sociolinguistic study of indefinite article forms in London English. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 38(4). 297-334.
- Siyanova-Chanturia, Anna. 2015. On the ‘holistic’ nature of formulaic language. *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory* 11(2). 285-301.

**Journal article also published electronically:**

- Inkelas, Sharon. 2008. The dual theory of reduplication. *Linguistics* 46(2). <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/ling.2008.46.issue-2/ling.2008.013/ling.2008.013.xml> (accessed 2 June 2017).



→ **Note: Publication date = year of online publication or year of the latest update. The date on which the URL was accessed should be provided in parentheses at the end of the entry.**

**Special issue of a journal (cited as a whole):**

Majid, Asifa & Melissa Bowerman (eds.). 2007. Cutting and breaking events: A crosslinguistic perspective. [Special issue]. *Cognitive Linguistics* 18(2).

**Reprint:**

Jakobson, Roman & Morris Halle. 2002 [1956]. *Fundamentals of language*, 2nd edn. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

**Thesis/dissertation:**

Azazil, Lina. 2015. *Frequency effects in L2 acquisition of English syntax: The case of the catenative verb construction*. Siegen: University of Siegen MA thesis.

Kim, Yong-Jin. 1990. *Register variation in Korean: A corpus-based study*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina dissertation.

**Translated title:**

Haga, Yasushi. 1998. *Nihongo no Shakai Shinri [Social psychology in the Japanese language]*. Tokyo: Ningen no Kagaku Sha.

→ **Note: The English translation of the title should not be capitalised.**

**Paper presented at a meeting or conference:**

Sarangi, Srikant & Celia Roberts. 2000. Uptake of discourse research in inter-professional settings: Reporting from medical consultancy. Paper presented at the International Conference on Text and Talk at Work, University of Gent, 16–19 August.

**Several works by one author/editor with the same publication date:**

Vennemann, Theo. 2000a. From quantity to syllable cuts: On so-called lengthening in the Germanic languages. *Journal of Italian Linguistics/Rivista di Linguistica* 12. 251–282.

Vennemann, Theo. 2000b. Triple-cluster reduction in Germanic: Etymology without sound laws? *Historische Sprachwissenschaft* 113. 239–258

**Corpora:**

*The British National Corpus*, version 3 (BNC XML Edition). 2007. Distributed by Oxford University Computing Services on behalf of the BNC Consortium.  
<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>

Davies, Mark. 2008-. *The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): 520 million words, 1990-present*. <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.

Davies, Mark. 2010-. *The Corpus of Historical American English (COHA): 400 million words, 1810-2009*. <http://corpus.byu.edu/coha/>.

## **4 Submission**

You must submit your paper both as a hardcopy to your instructor and electronically on Stud.IP (in the folder called 'Hausarbeiten').

## **5 Your Readership**

It is important to say that you should think of your audience you are writing for beforehand. Of course, the real audience is the course instructor, who will grade your work. Still, you should write the paper as if it was intended for a larger audience consisting of readers with some linguistic background who are, however, not specialists in the topic of the paper. One of the most important – and at the same time difficult – aspects of writing a paper is to put yourself into the minds of these readers. What do they know, what do I still need to tell them to make it possible for them to follow my paper? This is difficult because you are a specialist in what you are writing, so it may not always be immediately obvious to you what your readers know.