

LIN200 Assignment 3: Short essay #1 (30 points)

Due on **Thursday, March 11, 2021**, at 11:59 PM Toronto time, via Quercus.

Total

30 points

Caution #1

Instructions are meant to outline your task for this assignment and to provide you with context. If you decide to use ideas and/or wording from these instructions in the text of your assignment, you **absolutely must** cite and reference these assignment instructions (and either paraphrase or use quotation marks). Please consult the **Using Sources** section below for more information. Let Marisa and/or Kaz know if you have any questions.

Introduction

We have seen that human language is fundamentally, inevitably **creative**. Many sentences that we produce have never been said before (Lecture 1), and there are all sorts of morphological processes that can create new words in English or any other language (Lecture 5). People play with language on every level, in every known society. At one extreme are small puns and linguistic jokes; at the other are entire **newly invented languages**.

These are often called **conlangs** – a blend of ‘**constructed languages**’ – and people who create them are sometimes referred to as **conlangers**. Constructed languages come into being for a number of reasons. Some examples:

1. Some conlangs are fictional languages that exist in the background (or foreground!) of **science fiction and fantasy** (e.g. Klingon, Vulcan, Na’vi, Dothraki, D’ni, and J. R. R. Tolkien’s languages).
2. A few conlangs are attempts at **improving/facilitating human communication** (Esperanto, Interlingua, Lojban).
3. Some conlangs are individual passion projects (Mänti).

Linguists might invent conlangs for any of these reasons, or for the sake of testing ideas about phonology, syntax, language acquisition, etc., or as a **teaching strategy** in the linguistics classroom (see Nathan Sanders’s website!).

Most spoken and signed languages in existence are **not** conlangs; only a few conlangs have more than a small speaker population.

Instructions

Your task is to answer this main question: **do conlangs provide insight into the ways human languages work?** There is no correct response to this question, only more (or less) plausible answers supported by evidence.

Your essay will need to draw on course concepts – evidence – in order to explore this question. The strongest essays will also involve some additional reading in order to integrate (and cite and reference) examples from **at least one specific conlang that already exists** (see possibilities above).

In order to answer this question, we suggest picking **two** aspects of core linguistics (phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics) and addressing **one** of these questions with respect to those.

a) If we look across conlangs, what might they be able to reveal about how natural spoken languages work? How do they compare in terms of phonetics, syntax, etc.?

b) When a conlang is created by a particular individual, can we infer anything about that person's L1, i.e. primary language learned early in life? What choices has the creator of the conlang made in order to distinguish the new language from any they might already be familiar with?

You can **begin** to approach your answer to our main question as follows:

“By looking at.... [something interesting you found in your evidence/reading and thinking about course concepts], we can see that constructed languages [can/cannot] show us something about language that ordinary languages cannot. Specifically, they can teach us... [Or, specifically, they cannot teach us about...]. This observation about constructed languages is important because...”

Formatting

Your assignment should be **2-3 pages** in length (but you can add a fourth page for the **references** if you need to) with the text double-spaced (or 1.5 spaced) in an ordinary 12-point font and with 1” margins. In terms of audience, you are writing primarily for your course teaching team (think of your TAs as your immediate readers). If you describe specific examples from specific conlangs, you will need to provide your reader with enough background and information that they can understand your points (for instance, details about what the conlang is called, who created it, when it came into being, and what inspired its creation). You must submit your paper via Quercus **by 11:59 PM Toronto time on Thursday, March 11, 2021**. A reminder that we will give an extension of a week to anyone asking **more than 72 hours** before the deadline (3 full days). Send requests to Marisa by email.

Academic integrity

Note that we will provide additional training in citing and referencing in your tutorial on Thursday, March 4. However, we recommend beginning to think about your essay topic and collecting possible resources sooner than this.

It's important to remember that citing sources, and adhering to academic integrity more broadly, is about more than the avoidance of plagiarism. We cite sources for lots of **positive** reasons: to show that we've done our reading and research; to demonstrate that we are participating in a real, ongoing scholarly conversation; to separate our ideas from the ideas of others; and to give credit where credit is due (just to name a few of the reasons!). Academic integrity is about protecting the work and ideas of others, but it's also about celebrating your own work, and making sure you get credit for the work that you do. Citation should not be left until the end of the writing process – do it as soon as you have decided to put something in your essay – but if you have questions about citing sources or about academic integrity at **any** stage, do not hesitate to contact Marisa, Kaz, or your TA. We're here to help!

Buying essays or otherwise getting someone else to write your essay for you is prohibited. (Even *attempting* to do this is a serious breach of academic integrity.) You can discuss the topic **briefly** with classmates if everyone is willing, or proofread each other's essays, but essays must remain separate. Note that **any essays that look similar to each other will be investigated for academic dishonesty.**

You are encouraged to use course concepts. If you incorporate specific quotations or specific ideas that you have learned from the lectures/textbook, **you must cite those** (see below). Additional research/reading will be required for a strong essay, and you will need to **cite and reference** and **properly quote/paraphrase** all of the ideas that you learned from your sources.

Tip Sheet: Finding and Using Sources

(compiled by Erin Vearncombe, Writing-Integrated Teaching Program)

It is important to **evaluate sources** before using them. A Wikipedia entry, for example, is not as reliable a source for information as, say, an article published in a scholarly journal. Wikipedia pages can be good starting points for research, however! The links and references included at the end of a Wikipedia page may include great sources for your assignments.

If you've found a source that you love or seems really useful, particularly from the internet, run it through the CRAAP test before using it in your assignment.

Is your source.... **Current?**
 Relevant?
 Authoritative?
 Accurate?
 Purposeful?

If you're not sure about how some of those terms might apply to your source, more information about the CRAAP test criteria can be found here: <https://researchguides.ben.edu/source-evaluation>. If you have found a source using the University of Toronto Libraries catalogue, it will be highly, highly likely to pass the test.

B. Using Sources

If you are writing about your own pre-existing knowledge, you do not need to cite sources unless the ideas are closely tied to course material, in which case you will need to cite, reference, and either paraphrase or quote the sources of those ideas (textbook, lecture slides, etc.).

If you use any sources, you **must** either:

- a) paraphrase the idea (in your own words), put in a **citation** in a bracket immediately afterwards, and put the source in a **references** list at the end; or:
- b) use the exact words from the source **inside quotation marks**, put in a **citation** in a bracket immediately afterwards, and put the source in a **references** list at the end.
- c) in Linguistics, paraphrasing is preferred over direct quotation, but direct quotation is better than plagiarism! Paraphrasing is a challenging academic skill, but one well worth practicing. If you have any questions about paraphrasing, please let Marisa, Kaz or your course TA know.

A citation of the lecture slides can simply look like "(Lecture 1)" and citing the textbook as "(Anderson 2018:Chapter 4)", where the number after the : is the page number, is also enough.

You can use any kind of established style/formatting for citations and references (most linguistics journals have their own conventions!), as long as you are **consistent** and have provided all the details a reader needs to look up the source. Possible entries for references list:

Anderson, Catherine (2018). Essentials of Linguistics. Toronto: eCampusOntario/Pressbooks.
Available online: <<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/essentialsoflinguistics/>>

Brook, Marisa (2021). Lecture 1. LIN200: English Words. University of Toronto, St. George campus. Asynchronous. Week of January 11-15, 2021.