

## LIN200 Assignment 4: Short essay #2 (30 points)

Due on **Thursday, April 1, 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 the **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 academic integrity 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 human society. At one extreme are small puns and linguistic jokes; at the other are entire **newly invented languages**, such as the ones in Assignment 3. Through wordplay and other means, languages are always changing and adapting over the generations.

The **Uniformitarian Hypothesis** (Labov 1970, 1972) proposes that language change of the present day proceeds the same way it always has, as long as humans have had language. This is analogous to similar ideas in e.g. chemistry or physics or geology: we can study physical processes in the **present** and assume that they are showing us how these things also worked throughout (most of) the **past**.

In other words, the idea behind the Uniformitarian Hypothesis is that languages change – constantly – but the *ways* in which languages change are not, themselves, fundamentally different across time or space. Analogously, the composition of the atmosphere of the Earth has changed, but chemical reactions are the same as ever – we presume.

### Your task

Write an essay taking a clear position on the following question: **Does the Uniformitarian Hypothesis about language still hold in the age of modern online communication?**

In other words, have email, texting, instant-messaging, etc. introduced new **processes** of language change, or are these just new forms of data that help reveal linguistic variation that has always been there?

Note that there is **no correct response** to this question, only more (or less) plausible answers supported by evidence.

Some possible positions (your essay should reflect exactly **one** of these and do so **clearly**):

- a) The Uniformitarian Hypothesis still holds, entirely, and here is why.
- b) The Uniformitarian Hypothesis mostly holds, and here is why.
- c) The Uniformitarian Hypothesis does not hold any longer, and here is why.

You will need to draw on course concepts – evidence – in order to explore this question and defend your position. A reminder to **cite the course lectures and/or** textbook if you use ideas you have learned from these sources, and to put quotation marks around any quotations.

You will also need **at least one reputable external source** about some aspect of the linguistics of online communication. (Note that this source can be **in** or **about** a language other than English, if you would like.) The article that we **strongly recommend** reading and then using in your argumentation is this one (Gawne and McCulloch 2019):

Gawne, Lauren, and Gretchen McCulloch (2019). Emoji as digital gestures.  
*Language@Internet*, 17, Article 2. <<https://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2019/gawne>>

If you would like to use a different article (or multiple articles), see the **Tip Sheet** for evaluating sources that is attached to the **Assignment 3** instructions. Note that sources that simply **criticize the use of** language online or otherwise adopt a prescriptivist stance are **not** linguistically informed enough to be good choices of sources for this assignment.

## 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, April 1, 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

All of the same rules and guidelines as for Assignment 3 are relevant for Assignment 4, so here they are again. 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 strongly 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.