

# Linguistics 001 Fall 2001 Final Exam

## General Instructions

This is a take-home exam. It is being handed out in class on December 10, 2001, and it is due at (or before) the end of the scheduled exam period for this course, namely 1:00 p.m. on Monday, December 17, 2001.

In completing this exam, you may spend as much time as you like, and make reference to whatever sources you like, including the course text and the on-line course notes. We also encourage you to find ideas and examples in the library or on the internet. The only constraints are that you must do the work yourself, without the participation or help of anyone else, and you must follow the usual principles about citation of sources, use of quotation marks to identify the words of others, and so on.

The completed exam should be turned in on ordinary 8.5x11 paper, rather than in a blue book. All pages should be numbered and should have your name on them (for example as a header). The first page should include an indication of the total number of pages in the exam, and all the pages should be stapled together.

Please hand the exam in to the Linguistics Department Office, Room 619, Williams Hall. Be sure that you give it to someone in the office who can put it in the right place: do not just slip it under the door or leave it in someone's mail box. If you need to turn in the exam at a time when the Linguistics Office is closed, you can leave it at the guard desk of the 37th St. entrance to the quad, addressed to Prof. Mark Liberman. Again, be sure that you give it to someone who knows what to do with it.

If you need to submit the exam from a remote location, you may send it by email to all of us:

Eva Banik	ebanik@babel.ling.upenn.edu
Uri Horesh	urih@babel.ling.upenn.edu
Tsan-Kuang Lee	tklee@babel.ling.upenn.edu
Mark Liberman	myl@cis.upenn.edu

However, in this case, be sure to allow enough time for us to verify that we can retrieve your exam from the email, print it correctly using your selected fonts, etc., and for you to resend it (perhaps on paper) if there is a problem. If you need to send a paper copy from a remote location, please contact us for instructions.

## Exam Structure

This exam consists of a single essay, written on a topic chosen from the set of four alternatives given below.

You will be graded on the content, clarity and persuasiveness of your exposition, as well as on the number, correctness and relevance of the particular examples and facts that you use to illustrate or support your general points.

If you want, you may set your discussion in a larger context, as long as the defined topic is covered clearly and the larger context is helpful in making your arguments. Note also that if an essay topic asks a series of questions, you need not structure your essay to address the questions in the same order that they are asked, as long as you deal with all of the issues.

In general, we encourage you to spend as much time doing research and planning your essay as writing it.

## Exam Topics (pick one)

1. Every human language is structured around a large stock of distinct words. In considering why this is so, it is helpful to consider the alternatives.

What aspects of human communication are (or can be) wordless? What parts of human life would be hardest to manage without a language that has a large and extensible lexicon? Could there be a human culture that abandoned (or never developed) words? Could a non-human species develop complex and flexible technologies without having a communications system that includes something equivalent to the words of human languages?

This topic encourages you to speculate, but be sure to anchor your speculations with careful definitions, relevant facts and specific examples, using what you've learned in this course. Your answer should consider the role of language in individual thought, in interpersonal communication, and in larger-scale social organization.

2. How can concepts and results from linguistics clarify the discussion of public policy issues? In your answer, discuss at least three of the following five (educational) issues: techniques for reading instruction; foreign language teaching and language requirements; bilingual education for immigrant children; cochlear implants and oralism vs. manualism in education of the deaf; and the educational use of African-American Vernacular English ("Ebonics"). Discuss at least one additional issue from outside the area of educational policy.

3. A recent trend is for new company names and brand names to be invented by specialist consulting firms like Landor Associates, Master-McNeil Inc., Megalonomia, Namepharm, Namebase, A Hundred Monkeys, Wordforward, Namestormers, Strategic Name Development, and many others.

Discuss the sorts of linguistic analysis that go into this process. In particular, consider the analysis of new names at different levels of linguistic structure, and the psychological associations that may arise at each level.

You can also consider changes in fashions for naming companies and brands over time, or differences in naming cultures from one industry to another (e.g. the drug industry vs. the automobile industry).

Be sure to draw your conclusions on the basis of a large enough set of examples. You should make a large annotated list of examples before starting to write your essay. You can find materials both on the internet and in the reference section of the library.

4. Natural language is full of ambiguity at all levels. For example, words may be ambiguous in meaning; sentences may be ambiguous in structure; pronouns may be ambiguous in reference; and the relationship of one phrase to another may also be ambiguous. Sometimes ambiguities are used intentionally: as a joke, or to permit deniable communication of something questionable (*double entendre*), or to communicate the equivalence itself (as in Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign slogan "in your heart you know he's right," where the two meanings *conservative* and *correct* were both intended).

However, most ambiguities in actual usage are unintentional. Furthermore, every piece of speech or writing contains many such unintended ambiguities. Although these unintended ambiguities do not appear to add any value to the communication, they normally do not cause any problems either. Why not? What distinguishes troublesome ambiguities, which hinder communication or lead to misunderstanding, from harmless ones? If you like, you can also consider this question from the point of view of computer programs that try to analyze (or in some sense to "understand") English text, or you can look at cases where intentional ambiguities were used for poetic, propagandistic or legal purposes.

In order to find raw material for your essay, analyze some published texts (such as newspaper stories, interview transcripts or technical articles), to find several examples each of lexical, structure and pronoun-reference ambiguities. Whatever tack you take on this essay, be sure that your discussion is well furnished with examples.

For clarification, below you will find simple examples of lexical, structural and pronoun-reference ambiguities in sentences taken from a DP story. These are the common and harmless kind of examples that are normally resolved by readers without being noticed.

In the phrase “six Chi Omega sisters are being forced to leave their house for breaking several national chapter rules”, the verb *leave* means something like “to remove oneself from association with or participation in”, rather than “to go out of” or “to bequeath.” The context of the story resolves this **lexical** ambiguity.

In the phrase “Three others were told they must become inactive members for a certain period of time,” the reader understands that this means that the inactive status applies for a certain period of time, not that the telling occupied a certain period of time; but the sentence is **structurally ambiguous**, so that the time adverbial might modify either the clause whose verb is *told* or the clause whose verb is *become*.

In the phrase “the committee told the involved members of the executive board that their punishments were harsher because they were expected to be ”role models””, the reader understands that the pronouns *their* and *they* are meant to refer to “the involved members of the executive board” rather than to (the members of) “the committee”, though these are cases of ambiguous **pronoun reference**, as most pronouns are.