

## English Department – Linguistics Division

### Types of research papers in linguistics

#### 1 Literature review on a linguistics controversy

The purpose of a literature review is to present the state of research on a linguistic topic or controversy or to trace the development of a linguistic analysis or a linguistic theory. The scientific value and the basic idea of a literature review is to organize a lucid or new scientific discussion and to structure the different, competing or connectable strands of theory in the literature. The aim is to explore and reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of the respective accounts or of various streams in the literature (e.g., new perspectives on old problems, advances in theory and methods, new “schools” etc.). The result of your work can be an independent position and a justification of that position.

##### examples:

From NP to DP analysis

New perspectives on “modularity”

A syntactic analysis of Relative Clauses in English - a critical comparison of accounts

#### 2 Analytical description of a linguistic phenomenon

The analytical description focuses on a linguistically relevant phenomenon that requires further analysis. In contrast to the literature review, an analytical description uses a specific descriptive format or model and applies it to the chosen phenomenon. A new analysis may be a result of the work, or it may be a modification of an existing analysis. The analysis of a linguistic phenomenon of English can be compared to another language or other languages. In most cases, the procedure requires an independent collection and analysis of data and therefore the use of empirical (qualitative and/ or quantitative) methods. You can design and run an experiment on your own, and you can find support in the eye tracking lab of the German Department, the “Wortschatzinsel” in the Department of Psychology, or in the “Methoden-Zentrum” in the Department of Sociology. The topic of a thesis of this type is often phrased as a “how” or “what” question:

##### examples:

How can the *past perfect progressive* be captured syntactically?

How do children process structural ambiguities?

What is the *middle construction* and how does it relate to the *passive*?

What do slips of the tongue tell us about the mental lexicon?

A comparison between English and Chinese *focus*: a Questionnaire Study

#### 3 Theory-guided empirical analysis and explanation

In a theory-guided analysis and explanation, an empirical phenomenon is analyzed and theoretically explained. Relevant theories, hypotheses or models are applied, which make causal relationships visible or establish them. Two types of research questions can be distinguished: On the one hand, those questions which aim at an explanation of the phenomenon in question that is as complete as possible, i.e., they consider all relevant explanatory factors. On the other hand, questions are possible

that examine the influence of a specific factor on the phenomenon in question. These papers may use single case studies as well as (qualitative or quantitative) comparative studies. The aim of your study is to gain a deeper insight and more knowledge about a phenomenon with the help of the chosen theory? You are not expected to answer all questions about a construction, but you should address open questions for future work. The topic of this type of thesis can be a direct or indirect "why question":

**examples:**

Why can DP analysis explain genitive attribution better than NP analysis?

Double Objects: evidence for "little vP"?

#### **4 Testing a hypothesis or a theory**

In this type of thesis, a linguistic hypothesis or a theory is tested for its explanatory power. It often involves a comparison of theories by applying competing theories to empirical cases in order to check which of them explains the phenomenon better and is therefore ultimately preferable. Which theory has the greatest predictive power? Which theory is "explanatorily" strong? In order to evaluate a theory it must be adequately reconstructed and related to other theories. In this type of work the focus is more on the usefulness of the theory tested rather than on the analysis of the empirical phenomena.

**examples:**

*Parameter Theory or Minimalist Program* - which theory is more suitable to explain binding facts?

Theories of reference vs. semantic theories