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Writing Basics

This chapter and the next cover the core skills that are needed to write a linguistics paper or thesis. In this first chapter on writing, I take a look at foundational issues such as where to start in finding a topic, how to do background research, and how to avoid inadvertent plagiarism. I also address nonexistent writing and the importance of obtaining informed consent for certain kinds of research.

I should stress at this point that this is not intended to be a style manual. I will make the occasional comment about stylistic issues, but you do need to buy yourself a real style manual (*The Chicago Manual of Style*, for example), and use it.

Finding a Topic

Students—especially beginning students—often come to their professors and say, “I can’t think of anything to write about!” Some professors get really annoyed by this complaint, but I have to have some sympathy, since I can remember fairly clearly from my own early graduate school days the sense that I simply didn’t know what made an interesting topic, or how to think of one in the first place. I think part of the problem is that students often think the way to find a topic is to sit down and concentrate really hard, and then miraculously something will appear in their brain. This doesn’t usually happen. Either the idea comes to you while you’re in the shower and *not* trying to think about it at all, or it comes to you because you have some prompt. This section will give you some ideas about how to prompt that brain of yours into action (for when the shower method just doesn’t work).

Approach 1: Old Volumes of Journals

Presumably you know whether you want to write a paper in syntax or phonology or some other area of linguistics. Choose some of the major journals in that subfield and skim over papers in old volumes of those journals.¹² Think

12. Not sure what counts as a major journal in the subfield you’re interested in? This is the kind of question you should ask your advisor or some other faculty member about. Don’t be shy—you’re not expected to know this innately.

about the data and problems that are addressed in these articles, and how they might be approached within a more modern framework. You may be able to find a topic that was handled somewhat clumsily in an old theory that could be dealt with more elegantly in a new theory. You might find an analysis that could interestingly be applied to new data, or an experiment that could be tried with a different subject population or dataset. Voilà: you've got a paper topic.

Approach 2: Reading Lists

Go over the readings for your course or choose a set of readings in some other way, and read critically. Look for inconsistent arguments, flaws in argumentation, and ad hoc solutions. If you can find some kind of serious problem in an analysis that someone else did, you have a topic. (Of course, then you have to come up with a better analysis, but that's another issue.)

Make sure that your criticisms are justified and specific. It's not enough just to say "this paper is dumb." You have to be able to explain why you think the analysis doesn't work and what's wrong with it. It's not an aesthetic opinion that you're delivering; it's a scientific judgment.

Another approach to criticizing an analysis is by finding contradictory data. Think about the analyses you're reading with respect to data in some language you know something about. If your data contradict the claims in the paper, that's interesting.

Discuss your criticisms and counterexamples with your professor(s), and see what they think. They might tell you that you're wrong, but maybe they won't. They might tell you that someone else has already made the criticism you've come up with, in which case you should find the source and read the critique. You may be back at square one, but that's okay. At least it verifies for you that you know enough to spot a flawed argument. Just keep trying until you find something nobody else has done yet.

Approach 3: Data

Instead of starting from theory, you might want to start from data. If you speak or work on a little-studied language, you have a wealth of topics right at your fingertips. But even if you prefer to work on English or some other highly-studied language, you can find a topic by observing some odd wrinkle in an overheard utterance. As you blossom into a linguist, you will gradually develop the ability to hear your own language (including your own utterances) as data, and this can be a valuable source of research topics. It's true that we may drive

our friends and family crazy by paying attention to the structure of what they say rather than the content, but this is just an occupational hazard.¹³

Another possibility—and this requires a certain investment of time—is to find a grammar of an obscure language, and start trying to figure out everything you can about it. Often the older grammars are best for this, since there are almost always strange nuggets of data oddly described in them.

To discover a topic working from a set of language data, begin by working through your data thoroughly and carefully. Make charts and tables and write rules. If the language is little known, you might be able to write a purely descriptive paper. But it's more likely that you will find a topic by thinking about how the data would be analyzed in some theory that you're familiar with. Chances are you'll find something of interest this way.

Approach 4: Questions

Green and Morgan (2001:17–22) describe a method that works when you have a vague idea of a topic that you want to investigate, but can't figure out where to start or how to focus it. They suggest making a list of questions about the topic that need to be answered, and even provide a list of specific questions that you might want to run through (see Green and Morgan 2001:18). They stress the importance of making up the list as a list of questions, not statements, so that you are forced to come up with answers.

Brainstorming in this way with your fellow students (or a professor, if he or she is willing) is very useful. In this case you need to start with much more general questions than Green and Morgan suggest, since the group or person you're brainstorming with will need to be filled in on the very basics of the topic. It's the act of explaining the details that often makes one realize what's interesting about a topic. The kinds of questions I've used in doing this as an exercise with students in my class include the following (although of course not all will be relevant to all topics):

- What is the general area of the paper (syntax, morphology, phonology, . . .)?
- What is the basic research question or topic?
- What theory are you working in?

13. Charles Fillmore always used to carry a packet of tissues in his shirt pocket. In the good old days, these packets had a piece of cardboard in the package to hold it stiff. When he heard something that grabbed his attention, he would pull the cardboard out and write it down. Since they don't put that cardboard in tissue packets any more you will have to find other things to make notes on—paper napkins, envelopes, whatever's available. Don't just try to remember interesting utterances or ideas—I can guarantee you won't remember them accurately.

- What language or languages are you focusing on?
- Have the data already been collected, or if not, what procedure will you use to collect the data?
- Has anyone written on the topic before? If so, who, when, and where?
- What have they said about it? What kinds of analyses have been done?
- Have previous analyses been done in the same theoretical framework you're working in, or in a different one?
- What problems do you see in previous analyses?
- Are there subparts to the problem that are going to have to be explored?

The first time I did this with my class as a demonstration, the person who volunteered to be questioned said that it was very useful to her. The other students came up with questions that neither she nor I had thought of, and to which she didn't know the answers. Far from being an embarrassment, this was extremely helpful—it gave her new directions in which to take her research.

Green and Morgan also discuss the problem that students often think “all the easy stuff’s already been done” (2001:17). They stress two points: first, it’s not true, and second, even when a topic has been “done,” it may not have been done very well. Becker agrees:

“That’s been done” very often does get said to people, . . . most often to students searching for a dissertation topic. . . . Such remarks rest on a serious fallacy: that things with the same name are the same. They aren’t, at least not in any obvious way, so studying “the same thing” is often not studying the same thing at all, just something people have decided to call by the same name. (Becker 1998:89)

That is, there are always more questions one can ask about any given topic, so don’t just reject topics that have long histories of analysis in the field.

Background Research

Responsible scholarship requires that you do a thorough job of background research. If you’re going to write on a given topic, you absolutely have to know what others have said about it. As an undergraduate, you might have been able to get away with not knowing all the relevant literature, but as a graduate student, you can’t.

One of the worst consequences of not doing your background research is the phenomenon of the reinvention of the wheel. This is when a solution to some problem is proposed that was already proposed (and possibly rejected for very

good reasons) many years back. It is an embarrassment when this happens—and you don't want to be the one who suffers that embarrassment.

So how do you find out what has been done on your topic? We're not quite to the point yet where everything is on the web, so you will probably have to make some trips to the library. But a combination of web searching and library work should get you most of it.¹⁴

Whenever I write a paper, I start a bibliography on the topic.¹⁵ My goal is to make it as complete as I possibly can. The actual degree of thoroughness will, of course, vary depending on what the topic is—a thorough bibliography on switch reference is much more doable than a bibliography on everything ever written on the passive, for example. If you're working on a broad topic that has been worked on extensively before, narrow it down to some relevant parameters and focus on that in your bibliography. You might just look at works within a specific theory, or in a particular language or language family, for instance. Read as much as you can—it can't hurt.¹⁶

It's helpful, too, to annotate your bibliography. At this point, it's just for your own use, but doing this will help you to remember what was useful in particular works, why you included particular items, and so on.

The next section looks at the resources you can use to find references on your topic. But there is one additional method that I always use: scanning the references sections of the works I've already found. Obviously by doing this you can't find anything more modern than the article or book whose references you're looking at, but you will note that certain references get repeated over and over again—a hint that those are considered the primary works on the topic. You should make sure that you address them in your paper too.

Library Resources

There are many bibliographies of works in linguistics, both in printed and electronic form, as listed below. Talk to a reference librarian about which ones your library has, and also about getting electronic access. Reference librarians are amazingly knowledgeable, and may be able to direct you to bibliographies and resources other than the ones that are listed here, especially if your topic diverges from fairly core linguistic areas.

14. You can also ask your professors for suggestions of work that has been done on your topic. But do that *after* you have checked the web and the library, rather than as a substitute.

15. See chapter 4 for discussion of citation managers, programs that can make keeping track of references much easier.

16. I do have to put in a word of caution here. Reading background material can become an obsession, and it can turn into a way to avoid actually doing any writing. So do read a lot, but don't let it keep you from doing your own work.

Major Sources for Linguistics

- Bulletin Signalétique 524: Sciences du Langage
- Dissertation Abstracts
- Humanities Index
- Language Teaching
- Linguistic Bibliography
- Linguistics Abstracts
- Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA)
- MLA Bibliography (Part III: Linguistics)

The one that I have found most useful in my work is LLBA. Nonetheless, you should scour as many of these as possible for articles on your topic, since the different bibliographies cover different sources with only partial overlap. It gets repetitive, but is worth the effort.

The Scientific Method

Once you have a topic, and have found the relevant literature, you need to find a way to approach your topic. Luckily for us there's a standard way to deal with linguistic data: the good old scientific method.

One challenge facing some new linguistics graduate students is that they come in with a background in the humanities, rather than the sciences. This can make it difficult to adjust to the very different style of writing and argumentation that is appropriate in this field.

A fellow linguist—one who shares my concern for student writing—found a poster about the scientific method in a teachers' supply store, and I often use it to try to get the basics across. Here are the steps it lists:

Steps in the Scientific Method

- Choose a problem
- Research your problem
- Develop a hypothesis
- Figure out the procedure you will need to follow
- Test your hypothesis
- Organize your data
- State your conclusions

Right there you've got a nice recipe for how to do linguistic research. You first need to find a topic—and I've already covered that. Then you need to do research on the topic. The advice the poster gives is: "Look in books, get advice, make observations." In other words, do your library and web research, talk to your advisor and/or other professors, and start thinking about relevant data. Next

you need to develop a hypothesis, which means coming up with a possible answer to the question you posed at the beginning of the process. Your hypothesis might be wrong, but that's a result too. When your hypothesis is wrong, you adjust it, and try again. That's how science progresses: we make a hypothesis, then we or others prove it wrong, and then we or others make a new hypothesis.

Don't work on your hypothesis all by yourself. Discuss it with your peers and your professors. Whatever you do, don't write up your whole paper without talking through your ideas with somebody (or somebodies). You will have wasted a lot of time if it turns out that you made one wrong assumption somewhere that ruins your whole hypothesis, and which someone could have pointed out to you earlier in the process.

In figuring out your procedures, the poster advises, "Write down *everything* you will do. Others should be able to repeat your experiment by reading your procedures." If you're doing any kind of experimental or survey work, this is a rule to live by. And if you're not doing an experiment or survey, it's still important to be explicit about the steps you take to arrive at your conclusions. Your hypothesis must be testable by others. The poster also warns, "Control your variables"—this is as important in finding or eliciting example sentences as it is in designing a questionnaire. (I talk more about examples in the next chapter.)

To test your hypothesis, you need to run your experiment, administer your questionnaire, or gather and analyze your data. The poster somewhat sanctimoniously reminds you here: "Be honest." It's good advice. You cannot succeed in linguistics or any academic or scientific field if you fake your data.

Once you've gathered the relevant information, you'll need to organize the data. I can't emphasize the importance of this enough. You will not be able to come to any kind of valid conclusions by just eyeballing your data. And skimming through your notebook twenty times to find a sentence you're positive you elicited (if you could only find it) is a huge waste of time. You'll have to organize your data into some kind of database (whether it be the old-fashioned index card kind, electronic, or something else that works for you). Then you can start playing with it, counting things, making charts and tables and graphs—whatever will help you to visualize what's going on.

As you're going over your data, think back to your beginning linguistics courses. The phonology, syntax, and morphology problems that you were most likely given contained a controlled set of data, and your task was to look for a generalization that accounted for everything you found. The generalization is the holy grail of linguistics, and the linguist's job is to find it. Your job now is exactly the same as it was in those problem sets—with one difference: the data set isn't controlled, and the data are likely to be much more messy. It's a harder task, but essentially the same approach will work.

And finally, state your conclusions. Don't beat around the bush, thinking it's better to be coy. Say what you found, and what it means.

Making an Argument

There's actually a step missing in the above list of steps in the scientific method, and this is that you usually can't just go from data to conclusions. In most linguistic work, you must argue for your conclusions. Now, if you're measuring some phonetic variable, and your paper is purely a report on those measurements, you don't really need to argue for the measurements. But this won't work for a paper providing an analysis of some syntactic construction or making a theoretical claim about some phonetic data.

Steps in an Argument

A linguistic argument contains, at the very least, the following steps: a statement of the claim being made; the introduction of supporting evidence, usually in the form of linguistic data; and an explanation of how the evidence supports the claim. Let's take a look at each step in some detail.

- **State the claim you are making**

State your claim very explicitly. Contextualize it: what theoretical assumptions do you make? Are you looking at only one language in making this claim, or do you intend it to be universal? Is there a typological component to your claim—i.e., does your claim involve patterns across sets of languages? Does your claim contradict someone else's claim? (If so, you'll need to take some space to lay out the previous claim.)

- **Introduce supporting evidence, usually in the form of linguistic data**

Make sure that your data really support your claim. This may sound so obvious that it's absurd, but it's something that people do slip up on. Under this heading you can also introduce quotes from other authors, cite data from others' work, and so on. Just be sure that everything you put in is relevant, or it will actually detract from your argument.

- **Explain how the evidence supports your claim**

After you've introduced your evidence, you have to explain why it's relevant. Be explicit. Walk the reader through the data and then *explain* how the data support the claim. Don't assume it will be obvious to the reader—it may not be.

Most papers will have a single, central claim, supported by various kinds of evidence, so the last two steps may be repeated several times. The more distinct arguments you can make for your claim, the stronger the claim becomes. Just be sure that you're not being repetitive, and that your arguments are solid.

A common addition to the steps above is the development of several alternative hypotheses to explain the data. These competing hypotheses are compared,

and one is chosen as better than the others. The decision about which is best is based on a principle known as Occam's Razor, which boils down to choosing the simplest explanation. Linguistics, like other sciences, values simplicity and parsimony in explanation. So, for example, an explanation which involves one principle is valued more highly than one which involves two principles (all other things being equal).

Another addition to the above list arises in certain sorts of theoretical arguments, where you need to explore the predictions that a claim makes. If you claim that a particular analysis of a given set of data is the right one, that may make predictions about the correct analysis of other data, which then need to be checked. If the predictions hold, this is good support for your claim.

Mistakes to Avoid

- **Don't confuse the notion of making an argument with the notion of having an argument**
You're not arguing *with* somebody about your claim; you're arguing *for* a claim. It may be true that part of what you want to do in your paper is contradict someone else's claim, but that's a separate issue from arguing for your claim. See "Discussing the Opposition" on page 42.
- **Don't present supporting data without explaining why the data support the claim**
Explicitness is considered a virtue in linguistic writing. As I said above, don't assume that the point of a set of data is so obvious that it does not bear repeating. Explain every single example.
- **Don't argue against a straw man**
A straw man (perhaps I should call it a "straw person") is a position that an author sets up purely for the purposes of tearing it down. The worst form of straw man argumentation is to ascribe a position or claim to some author which is not in fact what that author said. If X is a misrepresentation of someone's position, or if X is a claim that no reasonable person would ever make, then you're wasting your time arguing against X.
- **Don't hedge**
Hedges are expressions like "I think," "it seems," "it appears," "it might be," "sort of," "maybe," etc. These undermine your argument, and should be avoided. If you're not sure about your claims, you shouldn't be writing about them. It's as simple as that. Nonetheless, most of us still can't help putting hedges in, and this is one place where your editors can really help you: tell them to be ruthless about taking the hedges out. When I write, I'm acutely aware of the hedges I put into my statements, since I've thought so much about the topic of writing. But sometimes I just can't help myself—

and one of my editor's major jobs when he reads over my work is taking them out. Try to be aware of them, try to avoid them, and then make sure you have someone else read your work to take out the ones that slipped in anyway.

- **Don't claim something is an argument when it's really only an observation**

I often see a real misuse of the word *argue* in student papers. The usual pattern is to give some data, point out something factual about the data, and then later in the paper incorrectly say, "I argued above that the data show X." Be sure that when you say you argued for something, you really did.

A Final Note about Argumentation

Perlmutter (1974:83) points out that learning argumentation is actually more important than learning the specifics of some theoretical position, in that the specifics will change over time, while the mode of argumentation stays the same. This is not to say that you don't have to learn the specifics, but just that you have to realize and remember that those specifics are only as good as the arguments they are based on. The best way to learn linguistic argumentation is to read a lot of linguistics. When you read, pay attention to the way that the authors argue for their points, as well as to the points themselves. Observe how they present their hypotheses, how they present the data, and how they compare competing hypotheses. After a while argumentation should become second nature to you.

Respect

Discussing the Opposition

It's very common for younger scholars to relish the idea of ripping into someone else's work, and to go overboard in doing it. But trust me on this one: if you do this, you'll regret it later on in life. It's not that you can't disagree with other authors; in fact, that's what a great deal of the literature in any field involves. But you have to learn to express your disagreements respectfully. The authors in question didn't make the claims they made because they are idiots; they made their claims based on some sort of evidence and some sort of argumentation. If you think they were wrong, show where they went wrong, but don't insult them. Even if you privately do think someone is an idiot, keep it to yourself.

Nonsexist Writing

Nonsexist writing is important both in the text and in the example sentences. Within the text, the main issue that arises for linguists is pronominal usage, and there is a set of common ways to handle this (e.g., the use of a plural pronoun

or *he or she* rather than a masculine pronoun). But it is the example sentences that can really get us in trouble. In fact, Colleen Brice and I coauthored a paper (Macaulay and Brice 1997) on the results of a study we did of the example sentences in eleven syntax textbooks, where we found an enormous amount of gender bias and stereotyped behavior represented. We linguists often don't think about the content of example sentences, but their content is very salient to readers.

Why should you care about nonsexist writing? A good selfish reason is that many other people care, and if you use a style (say, the so-called "generic *he*") that offends some of your readers, you will distract their attention from the content of your work to the style of your work.¹⁷ A more general reason is that study after study has shown that some readers do feel excluded by writing that uses sexist language and forms. That is, these really do have effects on readers, both direct (the sense of exclusion) and indirect (the annoyance factor). No matter what your political stance on the subject, your goal should be to get as many people as possible to appreciate your research—and avoiding sexist language is one way to avoid alienating a large part of your potential audience.

The LSA (among many other professional organizations) has adopted guidelines on nonsexist writing—see www.lsadc.org/info/lsa-res-usage.cfm.¹⁸

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a tough topic to talk about. The minute it's raised, students start feeling defensive, as if they are being accused of something. But it's critically important to understand what counts as plagiarism, and even the most scrupulously honest student may not understand the fine points.

Some studies have shown that international students have a harder time avoiding plagiarism than North American students do (e.g., Wang 1997, Deckert 1993), but other studies throw some doubt on those claims. This is the first issue that I address here. Most North American students think that they already know what plagiarism is, but nonetheless everyone should read the second section below about various types of plagiarism. The antidote to plagiarism, paraphrasing, is addressed in the third section below with examples.

International Students and the Cultural Explanation

In the North American context, plagiarism is considered a form of cheating which can get you an F in a course, or worse, get you kicked out of school. The vast majority of professors will react with fury when confronted with what they

17. Of course, this is also why we follow prescriptive grammatical rules in writing.

18. The American Philosophical Association has a more extensive set of guidelines located at www.apaonline.org/publications/texts/nonsexist.aspx.

consider plagiarism, and any attempt at explaining it in terms of ignorance, differing cultural norms, or the difficulty of writing in English will likely fall on deaf ears. This isn't necessarily because the instructor is insensitive or cruel; it may be because the instructor is not knowledgeable about how hard it is for everyone—especially second language writers—to learn how to paraphrase and credit sources accurately.

Pecorari (2008:12–22) discusses the well-known suggestion that international students have a harder time paraphrasing appropriately because of differing cultural norms (one which I cited in the first edition of this book, in fact), observing that “these culture-based explanations have gained currency in much the same way as urban myths do” (2008:13). That is, she argues that more recent research calls such arguments into question. First, she says that these explanations are simply not supported by the data in recent studies, and second, she shows that the research actually calls into question the very claim that international students plagiarize more.

No matter what your background, all students need to realize that in North American academic culture, *any time* we use an author's ideas and/or words, failure to provide the source (and to use quotation marks where exact wording is copied) is considered the gravest of academic sins.

What Counts as Plagiarism?

The University of Wisconsin Writing Center Writer's Handbook, available at www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook, includes a very nice section on different types of plagiarism. You might want to check your university's writing center to see if they have anything similar. In addition, there are various books on the topic, such as Harris (2005).

The page from the UW Writing Center first points out the most obvious type of plagiarism: word-for-word plagiarism. Some students think that this only applies to copying whole passages without citation, but in fact borrowing phrases and general sentence structure (not to mention ideas) is just as bad. I've seen many students take sentences from some source and replace key words with synonyms, thinking that this was adequate paraphrasing. It most emphatically is not.

The second type of plagiarism is one that many students—no matter what tradition they were raised in—don't even realize is plagiarism. The UW Writing Center's old handout called this “mosaic plagiarism” (which on their website they have amended to “patchwork plagiarism”). This is when the writer has paid a certain amount of attention to restating central ideas and reworking sentence structure, but still litters the document with bits and pieces that come directly from the original. Although this isn't quite as bad as word-for-word plagiarism, it still counts as plagiarism and must be avoided. I give examples of each type of plagiarism below, which should make this clearer.

Paraphrasing

It takes some practice to learn to write summaries of other people's work that paraphrase appropriately without borrowing too heavily from their prose. The Writer's Handbook I referred to above suggests reading each paragraph (or other convenient unit) of the original as a whole and then stopping to write a summary, instead of jotting down notes while you read. That way you can try to paraphrase the general idea of the original without being overly influenced by the author's particular choice of words.

In this section, I present an original paragraph followed by various attempts at paraphrase.¹⁹ The original is taken from Chomsky (1965:3–4).

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered.

Figure 3.1. Original Text

Linguistic theory is concerned with an ideal speaker-hearer, who lives in a completely homogeneous speech community. This person speaks his language perfectly and doesn't notice things like errors, changes in attention and interest, memory limitations, or distractions when using his knowledge of the language in everyday performance. This was the position of the founders of modern general linguistics.

Figure 3.2. Word-for-Word Plagiarism

The paragraph in figure 3.2 would be a completely unacceptable summary of Chomsky's paragraph, in that much of it (the words and phrases which are underlined) is lifted from the original, and used without citation. The writer (okay, it was me) has tried to disguise the plagiarism by moving some phrases around—but please note that this does not count as legitimate paraphrase. In some places this dreadful imaginary student has substituted a synonym (e.g., *changes* for *shifts*), but again, this is not enough. Furthermore, the paragraph follows the

19. This is modeled on the University of Wisconsin Writing Center's handout on quoting and paraphrasing.

original almost exactly in its structure. Now, in some ways the original has been improved upon, in that the excessively long run-on sentence of the original has been broken up into several separate sentences, but nonetheless the structure remains the same, another thing to avoid. Finally, note that our rotten, no-good plagiarizer has not cited Chomsky at all.

Chomsky (1965:3–4) claims that the founders of modern linguistics believed that linguistics deals with an ideal speaker-listener, and that we should still believe that today. The idealization means that the speaker speaks its language perfectly, without any distractions from performance factors such as mistakes, a faulty memory, changes in attention and interest, etc.

Figure 3.3. Mosaic Plagiarism

The example of mosaic plagiarism in figure 3.3 is certainly better, in that the writer has cited the author, reorganized the structure of the paragraph, and tried to paraphrase most of the content. However, there are still a number of phrases lifted directly from the original without the use of quotation marks, and this is what makes it mosaic plagiarism. I have seen many instances of mosaic plagiarism in student papers, and the students have almost always believed that citing the author makes it acceptable to write in this fashion. It does not.

Chomsky (1965:3–4) claims that the field of linguistics has long operated with the notion of an “ideal speaker-listener,” and says that he sees no reason to reject this position today. The notion of the “ideal speaker-listener” is exactly that—an idealization—that is, someone who has perfect competence in their language, and for whom performance factors play no role.

Figure 3.4. Adequate Paraphrase

In the paragraph in figure 3.4, the author is cited, the structure of the original has not been imitated, and quotation marks are used for the one phrase taken word-for-word from the original. Note that certain words that appeared in the original also appear here—e.g., *position* and *performance*. This is not a problem, though, since they are ordinary words used in very different structures than in the original.