

Day 2: Introduction
L303/L503: Intro to Linguistic Analysis

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- 1 *Linguistics*
 - Objectivity
 - Linguistic Competence
 - Subfields

- 2 *What is language?*
 - 'Big 5' facts
 - Design Features
 - Modality

Linguistics

What is it?

Linguistics is...

- “The scientific study and analysis of human language.”
- But what does this mean?

Objectivity

We all

- know a language (or more than one)
- have opinions about language
- hear and promulgate myths about language
- know rules about language/grammar
 - consciously: **prescriptive rules**
 - subconsciously: **descriptive rules**

But do we think about language objectively?

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive grammar

Linguistics is

- thinking about language objectively
- **not** the study of how to speak properly

Two types of “grammar”:

- Descriptive grammar
 - **describes** the rules that govern what people do or can say
 - natural, followed intuitively, need not be taught
- Prescriptive grammar
 - **prescribes** rules governing what people should/shouldn't say
 - not natural, must be learned by rote (in school)

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive grammar

Examples

Example rules

- Prescriptive:
 - Don't end sentences with a preposition
 - Don't split infinitives
 - Don't use double negatives
- Descriptive:
 - The sequence of sounds [rt] can come at the end of a word in English, but not at the beginning (e.g., art, *rta).
 - In English, adjectives precede the nouns they modify. e.g.:
 - 1 That is a big, red balloon.
 - 2 * That is a balloon big, red.

Linguistic Competence

Knowing a language

- Linguistic competence
 - What a speaker of a language knows about the language
 - Is subconscious
 - What linguists want to learn about each language
- What does it mean to know a language?
 - How to speak so as to be understood by another speaker of the language
 - Understand rules that govern sounds, words, sentences in your language (what is possible vs. impossible)
- How do we know what this constitutes? Not that easy...

Linguistic Competence

How do we study linguistic competence?



- How do linguists study linguistic competence?
 - observe our **linguistic performance**
 - make and test hypotheses
 - draw conclusions about what our linguistic competence must be like

Linguistic Subfields

Primary subfields of linguistics

- Phonetics
- Phonology
- Morphology
- Syntax
- Semantics
- Pragmatics

Linguistic Subfields

Phonetics and Phonology

- Phonetics
 - the study of the physical properties of **speech sounds** (acoustic phonetics) and how they are made (articulatory phonetics)
 - Example: “Park the car in Harvard Yard.”
 - [p^hɹɪk ðə k^hɹɪ ɪn hɹɪvɹd jɹɹd]
 - [p^hɑ:k də k^hɑ: ɪ hɑ:vɪdˈ jɑ:dˈ]
- Phonology
 - the study of how speech sounds **pattern** and how they are **organized** (i.e., the sound system)
 - Example: art, *rta (where ‘*’ = ungrammatical)

Linguistic Subfields

- Morphology
 - the study of the formation of **words**
 - Example: unhappiness → un-happy-ness
- Syntax
 - the study of the structure of **sentences**
 - Example: She hit the man with a hammer.
- Semantics
 - the study of **meaning** in language
- Pragmatics
 - the study of how linguistic meaning depends on **context**

Core subfields

Interdisciplinary subfields

Interdisciplinary subfields of linguistics

- Sociolinguistics
- Historical linguistics
- Computational linguistics
- Psycholinguistics / Neurolinguistics
- Language and culture

What is language?

Some general properties

'Big 5' facts about language

- All languages have a grammar
 - complex and “layered”, but systematic at every level
 - rules to create sentences/words we've never heard before
- All grammars are equal
 - not “the same”, but equally complex and functional
 - there are no “primitive” human languages
- Grammars are alike in basic ways
 - the same concepts and units; universal patterns
- Grammars change over time
 - all levels of grammar are subject to change
 - not always simplification / added complexity
- Grammatical knowledge is subconscious
 - we recognise im/possible sounds, words, sentences, etc
 - we can't always explain why

What is language?

Design Features

- Charles Hockett (1960)
- Characterize language, distinguish it from other communication systems
- If a system lacks even one feature, it is still communication, but not language

Design Features

- Discreteness
- Arbitrariness
- Cultural transmission
- Displacement
- Interchangeability
- Productivity

Design Features

Discreteness

Discreteness

Definition (Discreteness)

Larger, complex messages can be broken down into smaller, discrete parts

Example (Discreteness)

'pat' → [p], [a], [t] ⇒ 'tap', 'apt'

Design Features

Arbitrariness

Arbitrariness

Definition (Arbitrariness)

There is no (necessary) connection between the *form* of signal and its *meaning*

Example (Arbitrariness)



'whale' is small word for big animal,
'microorganism' is just the reverse

Example (Arbitrariness: counterexample)

iconicity; e.g., onomatopoeia

Design Features

Cultural Transmission

Cultural Transmission

Definition (Cultural Transmission)

At least some aspect of the communication system is learned from other users

Example (Cultural Transmission)

Any child growing up in a French-speaking environment will learn French

Design Features

Displacement

Displacement

Definition (Displacement)

Ability to talk about things not present in space or time

Example (Displacement)

A long time ago in a galaxy far,
far away....

Design Features

Interchangeability

Interchangeability

Definition (Interchangeability)

A user can both receive and broadcast the same signal

Example (Interchangeability)

Any conversation (where people trade roles speaking and listening)

Design Features

Productivity

Productivity

Definition (Productivity)

Speakers can create infinite number of novel utterances that others can understand

Example (Productivity)

"Little purple gnomes living in my sock drawer said, 'Elvis lives!'"

Modality

Signed languages

- Modality
 - auditory-vocal = aural-oral = spoken languages
 - visual-gestural = signed languages
- Signed languages
 - Not codes for spoken languages
 - Not purely iconic
 - Structurally complex at all levels
 - Meet all design features of language

Modality

Written language

- Written language = secondary to spoken language
 - Historical development
 - Everyone speaks a language; not all languages are written
 - Learning to speak is automatic; learning to write is not
 - More of the brain is used when writing than speaking
 - Writing can be edited