

Day 1: Introduction
Ling 200: Introduction to Linguistic Thought

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18 June 2007

1 *Course Goals*

2 *Syllabus*

3 *What is linguistics?*

- Definition
- Objectivity
- Linguistic Competence
- Subfields

What you should get out of this class

This class should help you

- Broaden your understanding of human language:
 - What it is?
 - How does it work?
 - How is it used?
- Recognize the *universal* properties of human language
- Appreciate the *diversity* of human language
- Become familiar with major subfields of linguistic research
- See how linguistics can be used in related fields
- Gain an appreciation of the relevance of linguistics to everyday life

Syllabus

- Textbook
- Policies
- Grading and Assignments
- Website, calendar

What is linguistics?

Definition

Linguistics is...

- “The scientific study and analysis of human language.”
- What does this mean?
- What’s this course about?

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

- 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 out 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^hɹɹ̩k ðə k^hɹɹ̩ ɪn hɹɹ̩vɹ̩d jɹ̩ɹ̩d]
 - [p^hɑ:k ðə k^hɑ: ɪ hɑ:vɪd^ɪ jɑ:d^ɪ]
- 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**