

I. Linguistics & Others

While there is a theoretical foundation (which is mostly what we're going to explore in this class), linguistics has ties to a lot of other disciplines. Examples:

Neuroscience: brain imaging studies of how language is processed and generally dealt with in the brain

Computer Science: automatic text translation, information retrieval (google.com)

Psychology: language processing studies, how language is learned

Education: second language learning, fixing language learning problems

History: how languages change over time

Philosophy: the meanings of words, unconscious logic of natural language

Mathematics: mathematical modeling of language processes (such as language learning & change)

Moral of the story: The study of language touches on many different areas because language has many different aspects to it.

II. Theoretical Linguistics & Some Interesting Things Having To Do With It

A. Phonetics

1. articulation and perception of speech sounds
2. one interesting thing: why people have accents when they learn a foreign language

B. Phonology

1. patterning of speech sounds
2. one interesting thing: English plurals (unconscious generalizations)
 - i. dogs = dog + 's' = dog + /z/
 - ii. cats = cat + 's' = cat + /s/
 - iii. nonsense word: bofe, plural = bofes (sounds like bofe + /s/, *not* bofe + /z/)

C. Morphology

1. word formation
2. one interesting thing: Why is a wetsuit different from a wet suit?

D. Syntax

1. sentence formation
2. one interesting thing: Why is it that we vaguely know what's going on in *The slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe*?

E. Semantics

1. interpretation of words and sentences
2. one interesting thing: Why can we say *The enchanted forest is a good place to hide* but it sounds odd to say *The rock is a good place to hide*?

III. So Let's Talk About Language Already

A. Language Specialization

1. humans seem to be evolutionarily adapted for language – lungs supply air for speech, vocal cords produce vibrations for sounds, lips articulate vowels and consonants
2. newborns respond differently to human voices than to other kinds of sounds
3. humans seems to have an inborn neurological ability to deal with cognitive aspects of language – word formation, structure, meaning interpretation.

B. Language System Qualities

1. Creativity...within bounds
 - a. We say new things all the time to express our thoughts, feelings, etc.
(creativity in sentence structure)
Ex: The brilliant purple hedgehog jumped neatly over the croquet ball.
Bounds: *Purple brilliant the jumped hedgehog ball the over croquet neatly.
 - b. We create new expressions.
Ex: Send an IM to Buffy → IM Buffy
Bounds: Put Spike in the dungeon *→ Dungeon Spike.
2. Linguistic Competence and Performance
 - a. **competence**: the ability to understand (novel) sentences & recognize was cannot possibly be a legitimate sentence
 - b. **performance**: the ability to produce (novel) sentences
3. **Grammar**
 - a. the mental system in every human being which allows humans to understand & produce sentences, as well as recognize what sentences aren't possible in a language
 - b. parts of grammar (nearly unconscious knowledge) – phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics
4. “Generality”
 - a. all languages have a grammar
 - b. no two languages have exactly the same grammar
5. “Parity”
 - a. all grammars are equal (they get the job done – communication)
 - b. because all grammars are equal, translation from one language to another is possible
 - c. no such thing as “bad” grammar in this sense – that particular distinction comes from some grammars being more socially preferable than others
 - d. **descriptive grammar**: what linguists care about, what people actually use to communicate
 - e. **prescriptive grammar**: what your English teacher cares about, ex: “Never strand a preposition at the end of the sentence.”, “Don't split infinitives.”
6. “Universality”
 - a. all grammars are alike in basic ways
 1. ex: all languages have contrastive sounds which distinguish words from each other
 2. ex: all languages have some universal constraints → “He fooled Jack” can never mean “Jack fooled Jack” in any language
 - b. even when languages differ, they seem to differ only in specific ways
 1. ex: “What do you see?” (English) → “You see what?” (Chinese)
 2. for syntax, we like to call the specific ways languages differ *parameters*. So English and Chinese differ along one parameter (the wh-word placement for questions).
 - c. Variation is often constrained by strong tendencies rather than absolute prohibitions
 1. ex: word order → 95% of the world's languages are SVO, SOV or VSO. (But there are still 3 other possible orders: VOS, OSV, OVS)

7. “Mutability”
 - a. grammars can change over time – the words, the structure, etc.
 - b. occasionally people lament the “downfall” of a language...but if language didn’t “degenerate”, we’d all still be speaking Old English
8. “Inaccessibility”
 - a. grammatical knowledge is subconscious
 - b. ex: knowledge of English plural
 - c. ex: Sarah went to school. *Lily went to enchanted forest.

Homework Questions

1. Verb Creation: Describe the meaning of the *italicized* verbs in the sentences below. (In other words, give me a meaning that could be substituted into the sentence to make it make sense.)

Example: They *Amtraked* to London. *Amtrak* = go by means of Amtrak

- a) Sarah *glittered* herself from head to toe.
- b) Hermione *owled* a letter to Harry.
- c) Lucius *sneered* his way into the gathering.

2. Unconscious Knowledge of the Sound System: Which of the following words could be possible words of English and which couldn’t be?

Example: *sprake* → yes, *kprase* → no

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| a) nded | e) veela |
| b) dend | f) vlee |
| c) plem | g) lvee |
| d) mepl | h) alvee |

3. Unconscious Knowledge of Syntax: Which of the following sentences are possible sentences of English and which are not? For each unacceptable sentence, change it so it sounds acceptable.

Example:

The goblins’ king left himself with nothing to do all day. (acceptable)

The goblins’ king left themselves with nothing to do all day. (unacceptable, *themselves* → *them*)

- a) Jack is eager to head off on his quest.
- b) This is the wizard who I took a picture.
- c) Jareth made Sarah a promise.
- d) Jareth made a promise Sarah.
- e) That Buffy continually refuses his advances surprise Spike.
- f) Draco will follow the dragon to what city it flies to.