LING 201 Introduction to Linguistics

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Agenda

- Syllabus

- Schedule

- Introduction

Introduction

- **What is linguistics?**

  – Linguists speak many languages. . .
  No, not necessarily! Being polyglot does not make you a linguist. . .

  – Linguists decide what is good English, whether we have to say "It is I" or rather "It's me". . .
  No, prescriptive linguistics is not necessarily what a linguist is concerned with!

What is linguistics?

- Linguistics is the study of language

  - its properties
  - its function
  - its use. . .

What is linguistics good for?

- Knowledge about the properties of language is relevant for:

    – education, anthropology, sociology, language teaching, cognitive psychology, philosophy, computer science, neuroscience, artificial intelligence. . .

What is linguistics concerned with?

- The nature of:

  – language and
  – linguistic communication

- Linguistic communication: information & knowledge

  – exchange, conservation, advantage, business. . .
  → main interest: communication across space and time

Why study language?

- We might focus on the **functional** aspect:

  - the use of language for communication
  - the analysis of communication processes. . .

- But, we might consider to study the **formal** properties of language.

Formal properties of language

- Natural language utterances are a combination of basic units of language.

  – Finite set of words, morphemes, sounds

- Rules and principles constrain the possible combinations, but allow for endless (number of) combinations.

  – Infinite set of utterances, combinations of the basic units

Formal properties of language

- "By studying language we may discover abstract principles that govern its structure and use, principles that are universal by biological necessity and not merely historical accident, that derive from mental characteristics of the species."
(N. Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, 1975)

Language and Mind

- Communication:

  – Language production:
    Meaning $\rightarrow$ Language $\rightarrow$ Speech
  – Language processing:
    Speech $\rightarrow$ Language $\rightarrow$ Meaning

- Breaking language down into domains and units:

  – to reduce its complexity

Language and Mind

- Breaking language down into domains and units:

  – Speech: acoustic, phonetic
  – Language: morphological, syntactic
  – Meaning: semantic, pragmatic

- External sense: acoustics, movements. . .

- Internal sense: grammar, structure, combinatorics, basic units. . .

Language and Mind

- Research issue:

  - Grammar and its properties
  - Grammar as a mental system: it is in the mind

- Modeling the mental state of "knowing a grammar/language"

Language and Mind

- Research methods:

  - Observations $\rightarrow$ Generalization
  - Formulate a theory
  - Test and falsify
  - Revise (positive falsificationizm)

Reading

- Chapter 1

- Chapter 2.1-2.2