

Introduction to Linguistics

LIN101

Lecture 1: Introduction

Fall 2024, University of Toronto, St. George
Angelika Kiss

The background features a stylized landscape with soft, wavy hills in shades of light blue and purple. The top portion of the image is a plain white sky. The foreground is a solid, vibrant blue.

WELCOME!

WELCOME!

I am Angelika Kiss, a recent graduate at the Department of Linguistics.

Main areas: semantics & prosody of non-canonical questions; pragmatics; word order variation; psycholinguistics

You will see me in lectures, office hours, and the final exam.



WELCOME!

This is Pocholo Umbal, assistant professor at the Department of Linguistics.

Main areas: Variationist sociolinguistics; heritage Tagalog; language contact; equity, diversity and inclusion

You will mainly interact with Pocholo via email, for administrative questions.



WELCOME!

In this course, we will learn about

- ▶ the production and acoustics of vocal and manual signs
- ▶ the function sounds play in a language
- ▶ how words are built up
- ▶ think of the role language plays in society

phonetics

phonology

morphology

sociolinguistics

But before we start...

WELCOME!

You may have questions.

- ▶ What is the textbook?
- ▶ Are there any tests?
- ▶ I have an accommodation letter, now what?
- ▶ Can I submit a homework late?
- ▶ Are tutorials online?
- ▶ How should I address the course instructors?
- ▶ etc.



CHECK THE SYLLABUS

WELCOME!

To read through the syllabus, go to the course website

<https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/352643>

Let's walk through it!

Language and grammar

What even is language?

A) The instructor is talking to you...

air gets pressed from her lungs through the vocal tract;

her vocal folds vibrate;

the shape of the mouth and the position of the tongue keeps changing;

B) ...and you are listening to the instructor:

tiny airwaves reach your eardrum and your brains perceive and process them as speech signals and finally...

you get the instructor's message!

How is this possible?

What even is language?

How is this possible?

- ▶ There must be a shared system: mental grammar
- ▶ The Big Question linguistics seeks to answer is:
What is language? (What is mental grammar?)
- ▶ Many people call themselves linguists, but not all of them are interested in this question.
- ▶ By "linguistics", we'll refer to the study of language that seeks to answer the Big Question



What is grammar?

grammar

/ˈɡrɑmə/

noun

1. the whole system and structure of a language **or of languages in general**, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics.
2. a particular analysis of the system and structure of language or of a specific language.
3. a book on grammar.
4. a set of actual or presumed prescriptive notions about correct use of a language.
5. the basic elements of an area of knowledge or skill.

✓ See more definitions

What is grammar?

Aspects of grammar

- ▶ Modality: signed or spoken?
- ▶ Mental lexicon: an inventory of form-meaning pairs
 - kosmaan 호박 pumpkin
- ▶ Our knowledge of language: implicit or explicit?
 - vocabulary: explicit (easy to explain what 'pumpkin' refers to)
 - morphology: explicit (easy to explain what -s in "pumpkins" does)



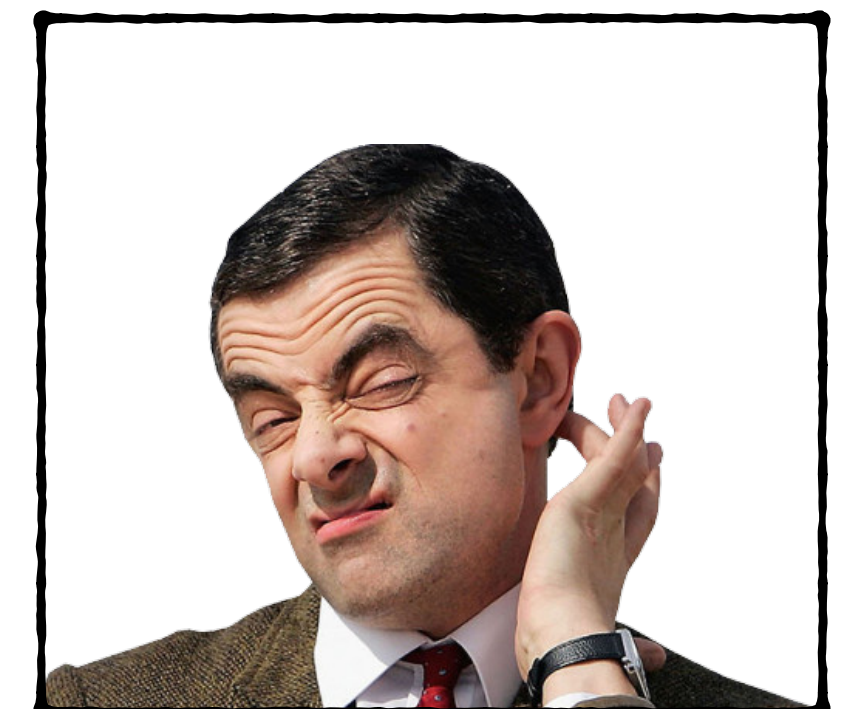
What is grammar?

Aspects of grammar

- ▶ Syntax: how to combine words with each other
- ▶ Syntactic knowledge is both implicit and explicit!
 - Explicit: Is "The chases cat dog the" grammatical?
 - Implicit: Why can you say "Who ate?" but not "What you ate?"



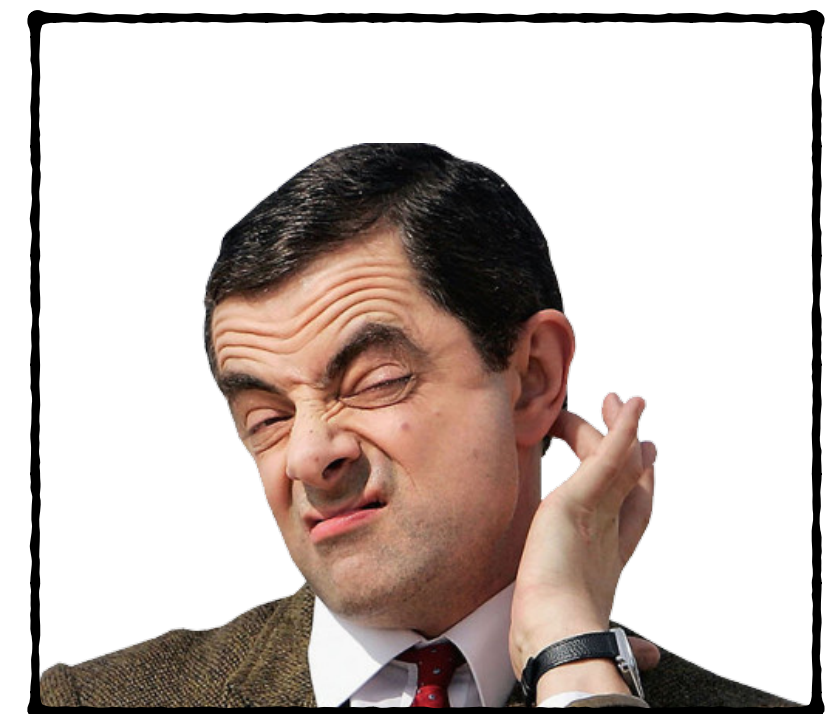
Who ate?	* Who did eat?
* What you ate?	What did you eat?
The * (asterisk) marks ungrammatical sentences	



What is grammar?

Aspects of grammar

- ▶ Phonology: how to combine sounds with each other (among others)
- ▶ Phonological knowledge is both implicit and explicit!
 - Explicit: Can a word in English start by [zn-]?
 - Implicit: What does our tongue do so we can pronounce the sound [k]?



What is grammar?


Aspects of grammar

- ▶ Phonetics: How are sounds articulated? What aspects of articulations matter? How can we describe handsigns?
- ▶ Phonology: Which pairs of sounds are contrastive in a given language? How do adjacent sounds affect a given speech sound?
- ▶ Morphology: How are words built? What kinds of building blocks are there?
- ▶ Sociolinguistics: How is language affected by the societal aspect of communication?
- ▶ There are further aspects of grammar, but we leave those for future courses.

What is grammar?

Do all languages have grammar? YES

- ▶ Languages without sounds, without a writing system, without dictionaries or books have grammar, too.
- ▶ Grammar is in the brain, not in books!
- ▶ No "superior" languages
- ▶ No "primitive" languages



All languages are
equally valid

What is grammar?



Languages are productive
and are always changing

- ▶ Productivity: Languages have a finite set of words which they can combine to form infinitely many sentences.
- ▶ Language change: Languages are in constant change
 - some words disappear, new words may appear
 - structures can change
 - Change is induced by different reasons: contact with other languages or for cognitive reasons

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How are languages studied?

How are languages studied?

Empirical observations

- ▶ Empirical observations are essential: Linguists make observations about how people use language.
 - Just like how biologists observe where a certain type of lilies grow, linguists observe phenomena and try to come up with generalizations.
 - If someone uses language differently from how we would expect, we as linguists should not judge them for it. We are here to observe, not to criticize!
 - Would the biologist scold lilies if s/he saw them grow in unexpected places?
- ▶ Prescriptivism (how language should be used)
- ▶ Descriptivism (how language is actually used)



How are languages studied?

- ▶ Grammatical words or sentences are ones that our mental grammar generates (aka 'well-formed' words or sentences)

(1a) We were walking in the park.

(1b) *We were walk in the park.

(2a) blifter

(2b) *kbifter

- ▶ Ungrammatical words or sentences are marked by an asterisk * (aka 'ill-formed' words or sentences)
- ▶ Well-formedness alone does not guarantee making sense!



How are languages studied?

Empirical observations

- ▶ Grammaticality is not a black-and-white matter.
- ▶ Who decides what is grammatical and what is not?

The language users themselves!

- ▶ Very often, certain people consider a sentence acceptable or grammatical while others reject it.

Why study linguistics?

- ▶ OK, let's say I want to be a linguist.
- ▶ But what do linguists do?

tech companies

completely unrelated

academia but different field
(neuroscience, psychology)

speech-language
pathology

academia

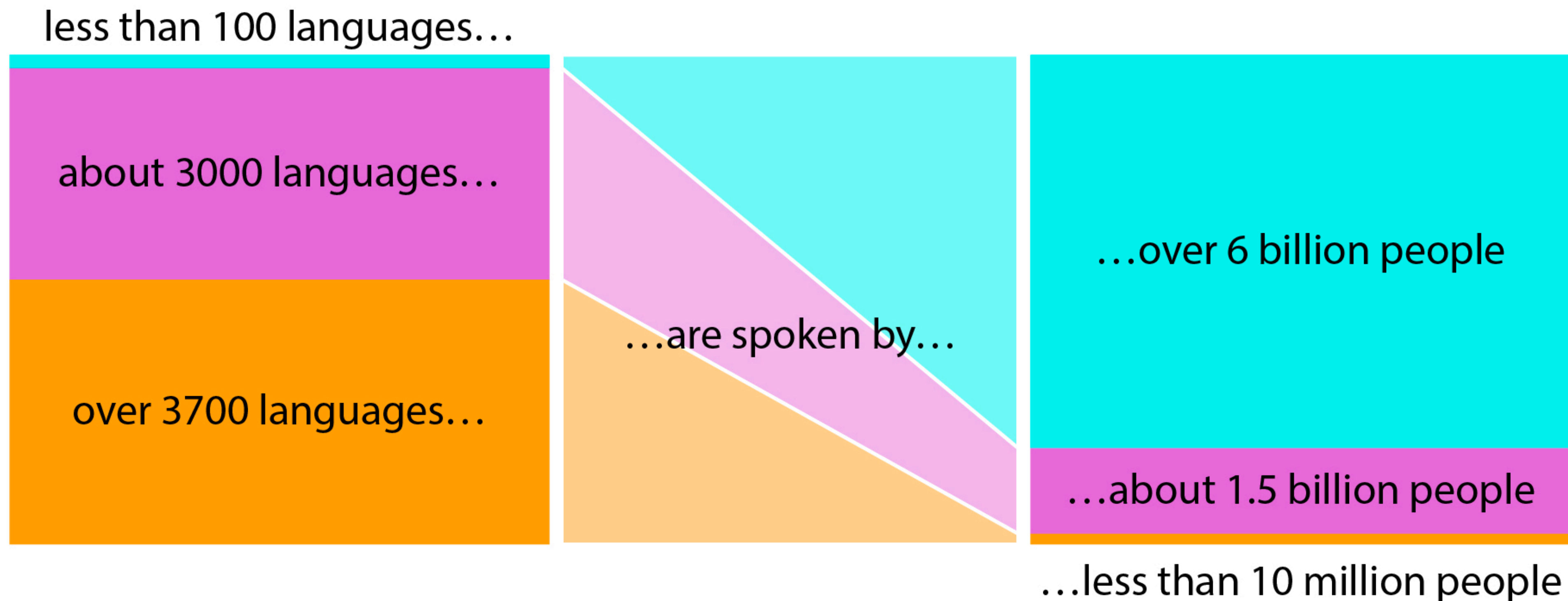
language
revitalization

Why study linguistics?

- ▶ OK, let's say I want to be a linguist.
- ▶ But what do linguists do?
- ▶ www.ethnologue.com

academia

language
revitalization



Announcements

- ▶ Next week: Lecture 2, we will learn about articulation!
- ▶ For a better learning experience, you may want to read the textbook before lecture or before tutorial.
- ▶ No tutorials this week! Your first tutorial will be next week.
- ▶ Office hours: today at SS4086, Friday at noon (zoom), Monday at noon (zoom) - You are always welcome! No need to book an appointment but there may be a waiting time.
- ▶ Enjoy the rest of your first week!

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End of lecture 1

What is grammar?

Aspects of grammar

- ▶ Phonetics
- ▶ Phonology
- ▶ Morphology
- ▶ Syntax
- ▶ Semantics
- ▶ Pragmatics
- ▶ Psycholinguistics
- ▶ Language acquisition
- ▶ Sociolinguistics

What is grammar?

Aspects of grammar

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 - ▶ Phonology
 - ▶ Morphology
 - ▶ Syntax
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- LIN101
- LIN102
- LIN101