University of Geneva
Department of English

Introduction to English Linguistics

Material for 1st year lecture and TP
Module BA2

2019/2020

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a thoroughly revised and expanded version of the documents used in earlier 1st year courses in English Linguistics at the University of Geneva:

Haegeman, L., G. Chardonnens, C. Forel and T. Ihsane. 1999. *Semantics and Pragmatics*. Ms., University of Geneva.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?

I WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?

Overview:

Linguistics is generally defined as the **scientific study of language**. We can characterize linguistics as a scientific domain in the following sense (cf. Crystal 1987, cited by Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2003:1): "Linguistics shares with other sciences a concern to be objective, systematic, consistent, and explicit in its account of language. Like other sciences, it aims to collect data, test hypotheses, devise models, and construct theories." Thus, just as astronomers study the universe or chemists study matter, linguists take language as their object of investigation and try to discover its fundamental properties. Linguistics in this form is a relatively recent field. Okasha (2002:10) observes: "More resources have been devoted to scientific research in the last hundred years than ever before. One result has been an explosion of new scientific disciplines, such as computer science, artificial intelligence, linguistics, and neuroscience."

On a very general level, linguists try to find answers to questions like "What is the nature of language?" or "How does communication work?". However, these questions are too broad to be answered in a simple fashion, just as "What is energy?" or "What is matter?" would be too general questions in physics or chemistry. The object of investigation therefore has to be divided into smaller domains which can then contribute to a better understanding of the larger issues. As we will see, language can be studied from a wide range of different perspectives. Crystal (*ibid.*) observes that the "subject matter [of linguistics] … is unique: at one extreme it overlaps with such 'hard' sciences as physics and anatomy; at the other, it involves such traditional 'arts' subjects as philosophy and literary criticism. The field of linguistics includes both science and the humanities." The remainder of this chapter provides a brief overview of some of the main perspectives from which language can be studied.

1. LANGUAGE AS A FORM OF KNOWLEDGE

Language is often considered as the attribute which, more than anything else, distinguishes humans from animals. We all naturally acquire a language in our early childhood, some children even acquire more than one language. To master a native language means that there must be something in our brain which allows us to produce sentences to express our thoughts in that language and which also allows us to understand sentences expressing the thoughts of other speakers. The question that arises then is: What is it exactly that we know when we know a language? Or for our purposes in a course on English linguistics: What is it that a speaker of English knows when she/he knows English? Note that we are primarily interested

here in the native speaker who has acquired the language during childhood. This does not mean that non-native speakers are of no interest to linguists (see section 4 below), but the linguistic knowledge of non-native speakers varies considerably and it is of course the knowledge of native speakers that is the crucial point of reference when we talk about knowledge of a particular language.

Once we focus on language as a form of knowledge that is represented in a speaker's mind, we can make surprising observations. Consider for example the following two sentences which are both possible in English.

(1) a. Kim **is** happy. (full form)
b. Kim**'s** happy. (reduced form)

On the basis of (1a) and (1b), we may conclude that one part of a speaker's knowledge of English is that *is* can be reduced to *'s* (cf. also reduction of *are* or *am*). However, there are restrictions on this reduction process and most native speakers are unaware of them. Consider the following data.

(2) a. Kim is happier than Tim is.
b. * Kim is happier than Tim's.
c. I wonder what that is over there.
d. * I wonder what that's over there.

Whereas (2a) and (2c) are possible sentences in English, (2b) and (2d) are not. Before discussing these sentences in more detail, we should add a brief typographical and methodological note here. In linguistics, we mark a sentence that is not possible in a given language with an asterisk * and we call it an **ungrammatical sentence** – as opposed to a **grammatical sentence**, which is a possible sentence in the language. The distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences is based on the intuitions of native speakers. Such intuitions (also called **grammaticality judgements**) are one type of data that linguists use in order to discover the properties of a language. Another type of data consists of language produced in speech or writing.

Returning to our sentences in (2), we can observe that (2a) and (2b) on the one hand and (2c) and (2d) on the other differ only with respect to whether *is* is reduced or not. This means that the reason for the ungrammaticality of (2b) and (2d) must be the reduction of *is* and that therefore the reduction of *is* observed in (1) is constrained in a certain way. Native speakers of English consistently agree on this. But what is interesting is that they generally seem to be unaware of the restriction on *is* reduction until they are asked to judge the grammaticality of sentences like (2b) or (2d). The restriction on *is* reduction is not something that would be taught by parents or at school and speakers generally observe that they have never consciously thought about this property of their language. However, as their judgements show, they have the knowledge of this restriction.

The observation made with respect to (2), i.e. that speakers know things about their language that they are not aware of, is one that can be made again and again once we study

the properties of language in detail. Most of the linguistic knowledge native speakers have is unconscious. One of the main goals in linguistics is therefore to make **explicit** the **unconscious knowledge** speakers have of their language. In the following subsection, we will have a closer look at what this unconscious knowledge of language consists of.

2. SOUNDS, WORDS, AND RULES

What is it that we know when we know a language? First of all, we can observe that language is basically a sequence of **sounds** produced by a speaker. Hence, to know a language means to know an inventory of the possible sounds in that language. In an alphabetic writing system, these sounds are then represented as letters in writing. However, to know a language does not necessarily mean that one also knows how to write in this language. Children around the age of 5 already have a very substantial knowledge of their native language but they may not be able to write yet. Similarly, the large number of illiterate people around the world all know a language even though they cannot write it. Therefore, when we describe the basic form of language, we have to think in terms of sounds rather than letters.

Sounds are combined to form **words**. So apart from an inventory of sounds, speakers also know an inventory of words, i.e. they possess a kind of a mental dictionary (sometimes called the **lexicon**) which includes information such as the words' pronunciations or their meanings. This type of knowledge changes over a speaker's lifetime as new words are constantly added to the lexicon. For example the online version of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (https://www.oed.com - accessible on university PCs) listed several dozen new entries in June 2019 (e.g. *bae*, *berko*, *bridalwear*, *chuggy*, *dejunk*, *dep*, *gym bunny*, *schlockbuster*, *schmoozefest*, *twitter (v.)*, *twittersphere*).

Inventories of sounds and words are **memorized**. A child acquiring a language (unconsciously) memorizes each possible sound in its language until it has acquired the entire inventory of sounds. Similarly, each word in the lexicon has to be memorized because, apart from certain onomatopoeic words (i.e. words resembling the natural sounds they represent) such as *buzz*, *murmur* or *cock-a-doodle-doo*, the sequence of sounds constituting a word bears no natural or logical connection to the thing in the real world which it names. In other words, we could very well imagine a language in which the word *table* refers to the object we call a *chair* in English or vice-versa. Ferdinand de Saussure – a Swiss linguist (Geneva, 1857–1913) who is often called the father of modern linguistics – therefore stated that the relation between the linguistic sign and what it signifies is conventional or arbitrary. Given this arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, a speaker has to memorize each new word she/he encounters and add it to the list of items already present in the lexicon.[1]

Whereas sounds and words have to be memorized, not all linguistic knowledge consists of inventories of memorized items. Consider for example sequences of words which form sentences. Could we say that speakers memorize sentences, i.e. that they store an inventory of

[1] Note that even onomatopoeic words, which, as mentioned above, are less arbitrary in the sense that they attempt to imitate naturally occurring sounds, also involve a certain degree of arbitrariness. This is shown by the fact that these onomatopoeic words may vary considerably across languages. For example, English *cock-a-doodle-doo* corresponds to *cocorico* in French, *kukeleku* in Dutch, *kokekokkoo* in Japanese or *ake-e-ake-ake* in Thai.

sentences? This would entail that each time a speaker hears a new sentence she/he adds it to this inventory and that each time a speaker produces a sentence she/he has to draw it from memory. Such a conclusion seems implausible, as the following considerations show.

The first important observation has to do with the sheer number of sentences that we can create by combining words from the lexicon. For example, with the verb *to be* we can form sentences of the type *An X is not a Y*. Thus, we can pick some noun X and then combine it with any other noun. This is illustrated in (3a). Then, we can take another noun and combine that one again with any other noun. This is illustrated in (3b). (example from Jackendoff 1994:11f.)

(3) a. A numeral is not a numskull.
A numeral is not a nun.
A numeral is not a nunnery.
etc. etc.
b. A numskull is not a numeral.
A numskull is not a nun.
A numeral is not a nunnery.
etc. etc.

We could go on and on producing sentences like this. If we make a conservative estimate and assume that a speaker of English knows ten thousand (10^4) nouns, we could list $10^4 \times 10^4 = 10^8$ sentences under (3). Then, these 10^8 sentences could be combined along the lines of (4), which creates another $10^8 \times 10^8 = 10^{16}$ sentences.

(4) Since a numeral is not a numskull, a numskull is not a numeral.
Since a numeral is not a numskull, a numskull is not a nun.
etc. etc.

Sentences like those in (4) may not really make logical sense, but they are well-formed from the point of view of the grammar of English. A speaker of English could produce or understand any one of the 10^{16} sentences based on the pattern in (4). So the conclusion for the hypothesis that sentences are memorized would be that, since the human brain contains 100 billion (10^{11}) neurons according to current estimates, each neuron would have to be able to store 10^5 (i.e. 100'000) sentences. This would already be highly implausible. What makes things even worse is that the sentences in (4) constitute only a small part of the possible sentences in the English language, so that the number of sentences stored per neuron would have to be even higher. Simply in terms of brain capacity, it would therefore not make sense to say that sentences are memorized by the speakers of a language.

There are other considerations leading us to the same conclusion. While we suggested above that the number of sentences a speaker can produce or understand is very high, this is actually a bit of an understatement. The number of sentences in a given language is not just high, it is **infinite**. The *Guinness Book of World Record* once listed a 1'300-word stretch in

William Faulkner's novel *Absalom, Absalom!* as the longest English sentence. It begins as shown in (5).

(5) They both bore it as though in deliberate flagellant exaltation …

However, as Pinker (1994:86) points out, this record can easily be beaten if we embed (5) under a verb like 'write'. This is shown in (6).

(6) Faulkner wrote, "They both bore it as though…"

But that record could immediately be beaten again by adding another verb, as is shown in (7).

(7) Pinker wrote that Faulkner wrote "They both bore it as though…"

But then again, we also have (8) where something is added to (7).

(8) Who cares that Pinker wrote that Faulkner wrote "They both bore it as though…"

And we could continue doing this endlessly. Note that there would be additional strategies to expand a sentence, e.g. using a conjunction like *and* (e.g. *Pinker and his friend wrote that ...*) or using a relative clause (e.g. *Pinker, who is a well-known linguist, wrote that ...*). Of course, as a hearer or reader coming across a 1'300-word sentence, we would have difficulties remembering how the sentence started, so speakers or writers would not use such sentences if they want to be clear and easily understood. However, in principle such long sentences are grammatically possible and, as the examples in (5) to (8) show, every long sentence can be made even longer. So there is no limit to the length of a sentence and, as a consequence, there is also no limit to the number of sentences that are possible in a language.

The observations related to examples (3) to (8) show that language is **creative** in the sense that we can produce and understand an unlimited number of sentences. If this were not the case, you probably would not have been able to understand much of what you have read in this text so far because most of the sentences must have been unfamiliar to you. Thus, it is impossible to say that a speaker's knowledge of a language includes a memorized inventory of sentences. Instead what speakers seem to have is something more limited and more abstract, i.e. a knowledge of a certain number of patterns or **rules** for sentence formation. For an example like (3), we have some rules determining the basic sentence structure and we can then use this basic sentence structure with any noun we can think of. The same thing can be said for (4). Certain rules have the property of being applicable repeatedly (**recursive** rules). This property is illustrated in (6) to (8). Sentences (6) to (8) are based on a rule allowing an entire sentence to occur within another sentence after certain verbs (such as *write*, *care*, *say*, *think* etc.). In (6), this rule is applied once, in (7) a second time, and finally in (8) a third time. It could then be applied again and again.

Rules have the properties we need in order to deal with the issues raised by the examples in (3) to (8) while taking into account the limited "storage space" the human brain provides.

An important goal in linguistics is therefore to identify these rules that allow speakers to produce and understand language. Reconsider for example the data in (1) and (2) on the reduction of *is*. Linguists are not just interested in collecting facts like (1) and (2), i.e. in observing that reduction of *is* is possible in some cases in English but not in others, but they also try to discover the system of rules that explains these facts. So the question for (1) and (2) is why reduction of *is* is possible in (1b) but not in (2b) and (2d). A plausible answer to this question is the following:[2]

(9) R: *is* can be reduced if it is not stressed.
(Or more generally: A present tense form of *be* can be reduced if it is not stressed.)

Native speakers know rule R in (9) tacitly, and it allows them to produce and understand sentences containing *be* and to make judgements like those in (1) and (2).

R is part of a larger system of rules that speakers of a language possess. This system of rules is some sort of a **mental grammar**. Here, the term 'grammar' is used in a wide sense, including rules of various types. The rules we discussed in connection with (3) to (8) are related to sentence formation. Among this type of rules, we also have word order rules as for example the rule determining the order of article, adjective and noun (English: *an interesting book*; vs. French *un livre intéressant*). The phenomenon illustrated in (1) and (2) has to do with the pronunciation of a word (*is*). Other aspects of pronunciation are also rule-governed as for example the realization of the vowel in the article *the*, which depends on the nature of the sound that follows it (vowel or consonant). Finally, another class of rules concerns the creation of words and word forms. For example, regular past tense forms are the result of a rule according to which we can take a verb and add *–ed* to it. Nice evidence for such a rule can be found in child language. Most children acquiring English go through a phase (usually around the age of 2½ to 3 years) where they produce regular past tense forms with irregular verbs, i.e. they say things like *bringed* or *goed*. This shows that, since adults would not use such forms, children do not simply imitate what they hear but that they acquire general rules. And sometimes they use these rules too eagerly, so the next step in the acquisition process is to learn the limits of this rule. Further evidence for a past tense rule can also be found if we carry out a little experiment with any native speaker of English. Suppose we invent a new activity that we call *to loog* and we then ask speakers of English to refer to this activity in the past. They naturally choose *looged* as the past tense form although they have never heard this word before. They obtain this past tense form by applying the past tense formation rule that is stored in their brain.

Let us now summarize our discussion so far. We started with one of the central questions that linguists address, namely the question of what it is that speakers know when they know a language. We have identified three main ingredients of linguistic knowledge: (i) knowledge of sounds; (ii) knowledge of words; (iii) knowledge of rules. As already observed in the previous section, speakers are often unaware of this knowledge and the linguist's goal is to describe it in all its details.

[2] But cf. chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of the phenomenon of *be* reduction and the rule in (9).

Before considering some of the different domains in linguistics, we should briefly mention two additional issues that our discussion in this section raises.

(i) Competence vs. performance.

Speakers of a language possess some linguistic knowledge which is represented in their minds/brains. This knowledge is sometimes called the speaker's linguistic **competence**. The actual use of this knowledge in concrete situations of speaking or listening is referred to as **performance**. Performance is not always a perfect reflection of competence. For example, there are certain errors that can often be observed in speech such as slips of the tongue (e.g. *thirth and fourth* or *you forgot to add the list to the butter*) or false starts (i.e. the speaker gives up the production of a sentence before it is completed and starts a new sentence, e.g. *"A couple of boys… one other boy from there talked to us."*). Such errors do not mean that there is a problem with the speaker's competence, they simply show that sometimes there may be "accidents" when linguistic knowledge is put to use. Performance can be affected by various factors such as tiredness. A tired speaker may have more difficulties being coherent in his speech, but the actual knowledge of language stored in her/his brain is of course unaffected because a good night's sleep will be sufficient to remedy this.

(ii) Prescriptive vs. descriptive grammar.

In our discussion of knowledge of language, we used the term "mental grammar" to refer to the system of rules that speakers of a language possess. Some clarification may be needed here concerning the term "grammar". Grammar is sometimes understood as a collection of rules of what is socially acceptable and unacceptable language use. Examples of such rules in English would be the following:

(10) a. Don't end a sentence with a preposition.
b. Never split an infinitive.

In the light of the two rules in (10), consider the following sentences:

(11) a. Who did you talk to?
b. To boldly go where no one has gone before.

The sentences in (11) violate the rules in (10). The question in (11a) ends with a preposition, and the infinitive *to go* in (11b) is split by the intervening adverb *boldly*. Although (11a) and (11b) are violations of the rules in (10), constructions of this type can be frequently heard in utterances produced by speakers of English (11b being a famous example from the science fiction series *Star Trek*). Thus, we can observe a contrast between the rule in (9) (reduction of *is*) and the rules in (10). While violations of the rule in (9) lead to ungrammaticality, i.e. to sentences which are considered as impossible by speakers of English (cf. 2b/d), violations of the rules in (10) do not seem to give rise to ungrammaticality. How can this contrast be explained?

The contrast between the rules in (9) and (10) arises because the two rules are not of the same nature. The rules in (10) are normative in nature. They tell speakers how to speak or write, according to someone's idea of what is "good" or "bad" language. We call these rules prescriptive rules and a collection of such rules a **prescriptive grammar**.

There has been a fairly long prescriptive tradition in the history of English and there are still language purists trying to make a case for prescriptive rules nowadays. However, modern linguistics as an academic branch is not concerned with prescriptivism. As observed at the very beginning of this chapter, the approach in linguistics is scientific. To try to impose norms and prescribe is not scientific (the chemist does not try to tell matter how to behave, either). Our object of study is language, and we describe and analyse it as we can observe it. Thus, our approach in linguistics is descriptive and we can refer to the kind of grammar that we try to establish as a **descriptive grammar**. A descriptive grammar is a description or model of a speaker's knowledge of a language.

As an additional illustration of the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive grammar, consider the rule in (12a) and a sentence that is relevant in this context, i.e. (12b):

(12) a. Double negatives cannot be used to express a single negation.
b. I don't have nothing.

According to a prescriptivist, the rule in (12a) is a general rule of English and it has to be respected if one wants to speak proper English. As a consequence, (12b) cannot have the meaning of *I have nothing* or *I don't have anything*, but it would have to be interpreted as a positive statement (i.e. 'It is not the case that I have nothing' = 'I do have something'). For a linguist pursuing a descriptive approach, the situation is more complex. There are indeed varieties of English in which (12a) holds and in which (12b) therefore does not express a single negation. This is true for standard varieties of English such as Standard British English or Standard American English. These standard varieties are socially prestigious and considered as the only acceptable forms of English by the prescriptivists. Hence the existence of a prescriptive rule like (12a). Yet, in certain non-standard varieties such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), sentences like (12b) are used to express a single negation (i.e. with the meaning of Standard English *I have nothing* or *I don't have anything*). This would be a violation of the rule in (12a). A prescriptivist therefore considers this as bad language and he would want to ban this option. From a descriptive point of view, however, there is no such thing as good language or bad language. We simply observe that varieties of English differ with respect to the way they express negation. In some varieties, (12a) holds, whereas in some other varieties (12a) is replaced by a rule which says that the use of two or more negative words expresses a single negation. Both rules are part of a coherent grammatical system and there is nothing objective that would allow us to distinguish between a good or a bad system. In this context, it is interesting to note that a prescriptivist claiming that the AAVE option is bad grammar would actually be implying that early English (Old English, Middle English)

and many modern languages like Italian or Spanish are bad languages because they all do not respect the rule in (12a). Such a conclusion would of course be absurd.

Finally, a short remark concerning **teaching grammars** should be added here. Most of you are non-native speakers of English, so you will have been and will be using teaching grammars of English, i.e. grammars that are specifically addressed to speakers who already know a language but then acquire an additional language through teaching (rather than naturally through exposure). At first sight, these may sometimes look like prescriptive grammars because they tell you what to do and what not to do. For example (12a) could be a rule found in some teaching grammars. However, the aim of teaching grammars is different from prescriptive grammars. Teachers of English have to choose a specific variety of English they want to teach. The most obvious choice here is the variety that is generally considered as the standard rather than a socially restricted variety such as for example AAVE. So if (12a) is part of a teaching grammar, it is not because some prescriptive aims are pursued. Instead, it is because teaching grammars of English are generally based on a descriptive grammar of Standard English (rather than on a descriptive grammar of e.g. AAVE).

In summary, we can distinguish different types of grammars: descriptive grammars, prescriptive grammars and teaching grammars. Linguists are primarily interested in descriptive grammars, i.e. grammars attempting to describe everything speakers know about their language. The goal in this course is to discuss aspects of a descriptive grammar of English and our focus will generally be Standard (British) English.

3. CORE AREAS OF LINGUISTICS

Studying language as a form of knowledge, we can distinguish different aspects of language that we can focus on. The following are the main subdomains within linguistics:

- **Phonetics and phonology**
  In the physical world, language is nothing else than a sequence of different **sounds** (air waves). Speakers produce these sounds by creating an air flow from the lung and by modifying this air flow at the larynx and/or in the vocal tract (e.g. by moving the tongue). The **production** of speech sounds is a very complex process involving dozens of muscles that have to be activated. Small differences in speech production can have important consequences (cf. e.g. the contrast between *big* and *pig*). In phonetics, we study how speech sounds are produced and perceived. Phonology deals with the system of sounds within a language. It looks at the way sounds can be combined in **sound sequences** and it tries to identify **rules** affecting sounds (cf. e.g. the variation in the pronunciation of *the* mentioned in section 2).

- **Morphology**
  Sounds combine to form larger units, i.e. **words**. Morphology deals with **word structure** and **word formation**. It studies how new words are created and how different forms of the

same word are created. An example of a morphological rule was discussed in section 2: the formation of regular past tense forms.

- **Syntax**
  Words are combined to form **sentences**. The way in which words are combined is crucial. Whereas *Dog Bites Man* would be a newspaper headline that is only of moderate interest, *Man Bites Dog* would attract much more attention even though exactly the same words are used. Syntax is the study of **sentence structure** and **sentence formation**. The examples in (3) to (8) and in (11) in section 2 illustrate issues addressed in syntax.

- **Semantics/pragmatics**
  Ultimately, the goal of language is to transmit information, i.e. language conveys meaning. Semantics is the study of the **meaning of words and sentences**. An illustration of a semantic issue is given in example (12b), where we have to determine the interpretation of the negative words in the sentence. Pragmatics also deals with meaning but more specifically with **meaning in context**. As a brief illustration, consider the following dialogue: *Peter: Would you like a drink? – Mary: I am driving*. Peter's question is a yes/no question, i.e. a question for which Peter would like the answer "yes" or the answer "no". But Mary does not give such an answer directly. Instead, Peter has to infer the likely answer "no" on the basis of the fact that one has to be careful with drinking alcohol when driving (the context). Thus, general knowledge of the world has to be taken into account in the interpretation of Mary's utterance. This interaction between linguistic knowledge and other types of knowledge such as general knowledge of the world is the focus of pragmatics.

4. OTHER FIELDS

Phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are the core areas of linguistics. They deal with the fundamental properties of language. Findings from these areas can then be applied to many other fields of study that have to do with language, as for example the following disciplines:

- **Language acquisition**

  (a) *First language acquisition*.
  Linguists interested in first language acquisition study the development of sounds, words and sentence formation in children. Consider for example the following utterances typically produced by children around the age of 2:

(13) a. Where girl go?
  b. Kathryn no like celery.

If we analyze the data in (13) from a syntactic point of view, we can observe that certain aspects of sentence formation are quite systematically different in child language as compared to the adult language (e.g. question formation in (13a), formation of a negative sentence in (13b)). One of the issues that work in language acquisition addresses is how children move from their initial one-word utterances to complex sentences as found in the adult grammar.

First language acquisition is of particular interest for a better understanding of the nature of linguistic knowledge. One of the puzzles that language acquisition raises is how it is possible for certain aspects of linguistic knowledge to be acquired at all. Reconsider the examples (1) and (2) discussed at the beginning of this chapter. We saw in these examples that *is* reduction is possible in some sentences (like 1b) but not in others (e.g. 2b/d). It is easy to explain how children acquire the fact that (1b) is grammatical (they hear sentences like this), but how do children ever learn what is not possible in a language? There is no information telling the child for example that *is* reduction as in contexts like (2b) and (2d) is ungrammatical. Nevertheless, native speakers consistently agree that (2b) and (2d) are not grammatical in English. Thus, it seems that the linguistic knowledge speakers have goes beyond what they could possibly know from the information they get from their environment. Observations like this one have led some linguists to propose that some aspects of language are innate and that human beings are endowed with what has been referred to as **Universal Grammar**. This hypothesis has originally been put forward by the American linguist Noam Chomsky (*1928, Philadelphia), the most prominent linguist in the second half of the 20th century. However, the innateness hypothesis still remains controversial.

(b) *Second language acquisition*.
As we can study first language acquisition, we can also investigate issues related to the development of sounds, words and sentence formation with second language learners (who may acquire their additional language either in a natural setting through exposure, or in the context of classroom teaching).

- **Language change (or historical linguistics)**
Below are two sentences written in Old English, the earliest attested period in the history of the English language (sentences from *The Old English Version of 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People'*, end 9th century – word-by-word translation in italics):

(14) Þa gesomnedon hi gemot and þeahtedon, hwæt him to donne wære, and hwær
Then gathered they an assembly and deliberated, what for-them to do was, and where
him wære fultum to secanne… And þa gelicode him eallum mid heora cyninge
for-them was help to seek … And then pleased them all with their king
þæt hi Seaxna þeode … him on fultum gecygdon.
that they the Saxons' people to-them in aid should-call.

Without the translation, the sentences in (14) would be virtually unintelligible for speakers of modern English. English thus has become what looks like a completely different language within a thousand years. The changes English has undergone can be studied from the point of view of all the domains listed in section 3. Sounds have changed, words have changed, and the formation of sentences has changed. Work in historical linguistics tries to establish how languages change and why they change. In particular the question as to why languages change is often a difficult one. In principle, there is no necessity for languages to change (leaving aside changes in the lexicon where changes are necessary e.g. because new words are needed to name new objects). Children could simply acquire exactly the same language as their parents and this transmission across generations could go on and on. Nevertheless, change is a feature that characterizes basically all languages.

- **Sociolinguistics**
  This area of linguistics investigates aspects of language in society. What is of particular interest to sociolinguists is the way language varies according to certain social dimensions such as class, age, gender or region. Such variation can affect any core area of linguistics. The following is an example related to phonetics/phonology. More precisely, it has to do with the pronunciation of the sound corresponding to the letter *h*. In some varieties of English, *h* is omitted in certain words such as *hammer*, giving rise to a pronunciation like *ammer*. Linguists carried out a detailed study of this phenomenon in Bradford (England) and what they found was that the frequency of *h* omission varies very much across social classes.

(15)

Social class	% of *h* omitted
Lower working class	93
Middle working class	89
Upper working class	67
Lower middle class	28
Middle middle class	12

Variation as that observed in (15) can give rise to language change if a certain innovative option spreads throughout society. Thus, sociolinguistics can sometimes provide insights into issues raised by the domain discussed under the previous point (language change).

- **Psycholinguistics**
  Psycholinguistics is the field studying how the mentally represented grammar (linguistic competence) is employed in the production and comprehension of speech.

- **Computational linguistics**
  This discipline focuses on the interaction of human language and computers. Text and speech analysis, machine translation, or the modelling and testing of linguistic theories are areas that computational linguists are interested in.

- **Discourse analysis**
  In the core areas listed in section 3, the highest level of analysis is generally the sentence. In discourse analysis, the analysis of language is extended beyond the sentence to an entire discourse or to entire texts.

- **Applied linguistics**
  Applied linguistics is a cover term for work on a wide range of areas such as language teaching, translation, language policy and planning, or language and literacy issues.

5. ENGLISH LINGUISTICS IN THE 1ST YEAR AND BEYOND

The focus of the lecture course and the TPs in English linguistics in the first year will be on the core areas of linguistics listed in section 3. The main **goal** of the first year course is therefore to acquire the following:

- a knowledge of the sound system of contemporary English.
- an understanding of the structure and the formation of English words.
- a comprehension of the structure of simple and complex sentences in English.
- a recognition of complexities in the expression of meaning on both the word and sentence level.
- the ability to apply the tools acquired in the different domains to linguistic data, and an understanding of how these tools can be used for a detailed study of specific aspects of the English language (the English auxiliary system as an illustrative case study).

Courses in linguistics after the first year will then apply the different core areas to specific fields of study (in BA3, generally language change in the history of English and variation found in different varieties of English around the world).

Many students who choose English as their subject of study at University may do so primarily out of interest in English-speaking literature and culture. So they may wonder what the role of linguistics is in their curriculum. There are several reasons for including linguistics among the domains that are studied in the English department. The most important one has to do with the fact that a large number of graduates in English will pursue a career in **teaching English as a foreign language**. It is obvious that competent language teaching presupposes a good understanding of the language. In linguistics, the goal is to sharpen your awareness of how language works and to provide you with the tools that are necessary to analyze language in a systematic way. Just to give two examples of how the skills acquired in linguistics can play a role in language teaching: First, a teacher of English as a foreign language is always confronted with student language that diverges from that which a native speaker would produce. It is then important for the language teacher to determine the nature and the source of these errors in order to be able to address them. A good linguistic awareness helps the teacher in this task. Another context where skills acquired in linguistics are important is the teaching of pronunciation. In the section on phonetics/phonology, you will learn how the English sound system is organized. Teaching a student how to use the phonetic alphabet in order to know how to pronounce a word is particularly important for a language like English where the relation between spelling and pronunciation is rarely straightforward. Teachers

must also be able to explain to their students what aspect of their pronunciation is faulty and this implies a good command of how the sound system works. Other examples could be added here. Williams (2000:341) therefore concludes: "A knowledge of the particulars of linguistics is surely not the only sort of knowledge relevant for a teacher. … However, it is surely essential knowledge, and applied in an intelligent way, it has an important role to play in fostering language development."

It should also be pointed out that there can be fruitful interactions between linguistics and the other (i.e. literary) domains taught in the English department (cf. e.g. Traugott and Pratt 1980, Fabb 1997). Traugott and Pratt (1980:20) observe: "… linguistics can contribute a great deal to our understanding of a text. It can help us become aware of *why* it is that we experience what we do when we read a literary work, and it can help us talk about it, by providing us with a vocabulary and a methodology through which we can show how our experience of a work is in part derived from its verbal structure. Linguistics may also help us solve problems of interpretation by showing us in rigorous ways why one structure is possible but not another. Above all, however, linguistics can give us a point of view, a way of looking at a text that will help us develop a consistent analysis, and prompt us to ask questions about the language of the text that we might otherwise ignore." Areas where linguistics and literature interact would be for example the study of metre and rhyme in poetry or the analysis of style.

Of course, there are various other reasons to include the scientific study of the English language in the curriculum of an English department. Let us simply conclude by citing the different headings Crystal (2003:3) provides in his answer to the question "Why study the English language?": because it's fascinating, because it's important, because it's fun, because it's beautiful, because it's useful.

Recommended further reading:

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003), chapter 1 (and chapter 2 for a general discussion of the biological basis of language).

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CHAPTER 1 – TP EXERCISES

1. Non-standard English in song titles

Some popular songs contain non-standard features in their titles (i.e. features that are not part of Standard English and features that prescriptive grammarians would condemn). Here are a few illustrations (not taken from the very latest charts…):

(1) "You ain't nothing but a hound dog" (Elvis Presley, number 1 in 1957)
(2) "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing" (Duke Ellington/Irving Mills, 1932)
(3) "Ain't misbehavin'" ('Fats' Waller, 1929; a 1970s musical of the same name)

a. What are the non-standard features of the original titles?
b. What would these song titles have to be like if they were to express the same meaning in Standard English?
c. Can you think of other song titles that contain non-standard grammar?

2. *Who* vs. *whom*

The interrogative and relative pronoun (*wh*-pronoun) *who* is realized as *whom* in certain contexts. A prescriptive grammar would say the following:

Who must be used when the *wh*-pronoun is the subject of a sentence (e.g. ***Who*** *is the current president of France? This is the man* ***who*** *called you yesterday.*)
Whom must be used when the *wh*-pronoun is an object (object of a verb or of a preposition; e.g. *The person* ***whom*** *I saw was your sister. The person* ***to whom*** *I sent the form was on vacation*).

Now consider a sampling of sentences with the judgements given by many speakers of English:

(i) This is the student who/*whom went to my school.
(ii) This is the student who/whom I saw.
(iii) This is the student who/whom I spoke to yesterday.
(iv) This is the student to whom/*who I spoke yesterday.
(v) Who/*Whom are you?
(vi) Who/Whom did you see?
(vii) Who/Whom did you cheer for?
(viii) With whom/*who did you speak?
(ix) Someone who/whom I didn't know phoned me up last night.

a. In what respects do the judgements in (i) to (ix) differ from what the prescriptive rules say?
b. If we had to write rules covering the data in (i) to (ix) for a descriptive grammar, what would these rules be?

3. *They, them, their*

Consider the following examples:

(i) A difference of opinion which leaves *each* free to act according to *their* own feelings. (S. Ferrier; cited in Fowler & Fowler 1931:76)
(ii) *Everybody* is discontented with *their* lot in life. (Beaconsfield; *ibid.*)
(iii) *Every body* was punctual, *every body* in *their* best looks. (Jane Austen)
(iv) And *everybody* said *they* never saw so fat a haunch. (Jane Austen; *ibid.*)
(v) But *nobody* thinks of that when *they* fall in love. (Jane Austen; *ibid.*)

Concerning examples like (i) to (v), Fowler & Fowler (1931:75/6)[3] say the following:
"Our view, though we admit it to be disputable, is clear – that *they*, *their*, &c. should never be resorted to."

a. Why do you think that prescriptive grammarians are unhappy about the use of *they/them/their* in the above examples?
b. How could the use of *they/them/their* be avoided? Would this alternative be satisfactory?

4. Grammatical vs. ungrammatical

Are the following sentences grammatical or ungrammatical?

(1) Alan sent Marna a present.
(2) Alan sent a present Marna.
(3) I don't like them books.
(4) What did you say that John thinks we should do?
(5) I tried call you.
(6) Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.
(7) That ain't no good to nobody nowhere.
(8) Has the nurse slept the baby yet?
(9) John eats often chocolate.

[3] Fowler, H. W. and F. G. Fowler (1931). *The King's English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Cf. http://www.bartleby.com/116/index.html for an online version of *The King's English*.

5. Knowledge of language

Consider these two statements: (i) I learned a new word today. (ii) I learned a new sentence today. Do you think the two statements are equally probable, and if not, why not?

Homework for the second TP

Analysis of your own data – speech sample

(i) Select one of the samples of spontaneous spoken English that you can find on Moodle in the section "Documents/Course material/Data_analysis".

(ii) Transcribe your speech sample.

(iii) Hand in your transcription in your second TP.

Homework for the third TP

Analysis of your own data – Task 1

On the basis of an example taken from your speech sample, explain and illustrate ONE of the following two concepts:

- Descriptive vs. prescriptive grammar.

OR:

- Performance: speech error.

Your answer should consist of an explicit and coherently written paragraph (approximately 75-100 words).