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# Introduction

## Why SLTS need to know about linguistics

* Is a child who says *Him go there* language impaired?
* CELF Formulating Sentences - what kind of linguistic skills are being measured?

1. **Diagnose** language impairments
2. Identify **targets** for therapy
3. Devise **new** therapies

# What is linguistics?

The study of language, consisting of 4 subdomains

1. syntax: language structure
2. semantics: linguistic meaning
3. phonology: the sound system of language
4. pragmatics: language in context

## What is syntax?

* Syntax encompasses word order, and how different languages form different structures
* Example of different word orders in different languages:
  + English Subject-Verb-Object, e.g. Tom watches **TV**
  + Japanese SOV, e.g. Tom-san-wa **Terebi-o** Mimashita
* Examples of the way different languages form questions:
  + English questions involve movement, e.g. *What* ***is*** *he*  doing?\_
  + Japanese places ‘ka’ at the end
  + Spanish merely uses intonation

## What is semantics?

* The study of word and sentence meaning
* BIG QUESTIONS: How are word meanings represented / expressed? How are word meanings combined to form sentence meanings?
* A ‘compositional’ system - we add the meanings of the words to derive the meaning of the sentence, e.g.

1. The Queen of England likes Corgis
2. The Queen of England likes **Dachsunds**

Changes which affect the meaning of phrases (groups of words) affect the meaning of the sentence. Therefore the meaning of the sentence is built up from the meaning of phrases

## What is pragmatics

The study of language in context

A: Do you want to see Mission Impossible V? B: I don’t like action movies.

Interpretation ‘no thanks’ is only derivable if sentence is produced in the appropriate context

## What is phonology?

* Ask Ghada and Jalal!!

## Crossing over

While it is tempting to think in neat subfields, many phenomena cross over

e.g. The meaning of verbs (semantics) determines the number of participants in a sentence, which in turn determines the structure.

1. John [1] **gave** Mary [2] a book [3]

Because of these cross-over phenomena, linguists often talk about the ‘interfaces’ between the different subdomains, e.g. the syntax-semantic interface.

## Subfields of linguistics

**Theoretical linguistics**: investigates the nature of linguistic knowledge. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS: Are we born with knowledge of language? How do we explain similarities and differences across languages?

**Psycholinguistics**: investigates how we comprehend and produce language. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS: Is the human mind similar to desktop computer? Does the language we speak affect the way we think?

**Sociolinguistics**: investigates how and why language varies across different social classes and groupings.

**Discourse studies**: How we use language to persuade / exert power relationships.

# Approaches to language structure

## Prescriptive grammars - how we SHOULD speak

1. **Double negative**: I haven’t got no money / I can’t get no satisfaction

Acceptable in certain dialects (e.g. London English) and languages (e.g. Spanish). It does not cause confusion as many prescriptivists claim.

1. Use of **innit** as a tag question
2. It was a great meal, *wasn’t it* / *innit*?
3. You’re Jack’s nephew, *aren’t you* / *innit*?
4. They’ve been to Greece, *haven’t they* / *innit?*

This simplifies tag questions, but why is that a bad thing? Many languages create tag questions using single morphemes, e.g. Bengali *kanna*.

1. **African-American Vernacular English**:
2. He be working Tuesdays (he is usually working on a Tuesday)
3. He been got a job (he got a job a long time ago)

It grammaticalises concepts which are not grammaticalised in Standard English. Therefore it is RICHER.

So how do prescriptive grammars arise? They reflect the dominant dialect in the country, which in turn is a consequence of which regions hold the most political and economic power. As Weinreich said **‘A language is a dialect with an army and a navy’**

## Descriptive grammars - how we ACTUALLY speak

Geordie English: No plural suffix for nouns denoting a time period, e.g. *I’ve been here three year.*

Scottish English: Use of *amn’t I*? as a tag question, e.g. *I’m next in line,* ***amn’t I****?*

## Mental grammars - the underlying system

Which of these sentences is correct?

1. Me and Jack went to the shops
2. I and Jack went to the shops
3. Jack and me went to the shops
4. Jack and I went to the shops

Now which is the way you *actually* say the sentence?

Note that there is a conflict between prescriptive and mental grammars. Individuals who allow prescriptive grammars to override mental grammars are guilty of ‘hypercorrection’

# A communicative view of language

## Definition

1. Language is primarily a form a communication and all linguistic ‘rules’ subserve this goal
2. Linguistic ‘rules’ are established by speech communities
3. A sentence is ‘well-formed’ if it reliably expresses the speaker’s thoughts using forms which are ‘conventionalised’, i.e. shared by the speaker’s speech community.

## Relationship with SLT practice

When assessing children we should evaluate their language according to the norms of their speech community

For example, deviations from the target when scoring sentence repetition which are *consistent with the speaker’s dialect* are not scored as an error.

# 5-minute exercise

What is the grammatical word class (e.g. noun, verb, adjective etc.) of the italicised words in the following sentences:

1. The *raging* river tore through the valley
2. That film really *sucks*