



# What is Language

“Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols” (Sapir , 1921)

# Hockett's Design Features

These features are unique to human languages:

- ▶ **Cultural Transmission:** transmitted from one generation to another.
- ▶ **Displacement:** the ability to talk about the past and myths.
- ▶ **Arbitrariness:** no inherent relationship between the word and its meaning (sign and signifier).

# What is Linguistics?

“The scientific study of language by means of controlled and empirically very fiable observations with reference to some general theory of language structure” (Lyons, 1968)

# The core branches

## Theoretical/Formal branches

- ▶ **Phonetics:** The study of speech sounds in isolation.
- ▶ **Phonology:** The study of how speech sounds function in a language.
- ▶ **Morphology:** The study of the formation of words.
- ▶ **Syntax:** The study of the structure of the phrase/sentence.
- ▶ **Semantics:** The study of meaning.
- ▶ **Pragmatics:** the study of language in use in context.

# Paralinguistic/Functional branches

- ▶ **Sociolinguistics:** The study of the relation between language and society: how social factors influence the structure and use of language.
- ▶ **Discourse Analysis:** The study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which language is used.
- ▶ **Applied Linguistics:** is concerned with the application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to a variety of practical tasks, including language teaching. (= / Theoretical Linguistics)

# What is Linguistics?

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# The scientific study?

Observation



Hypothesis



Experiment



Theory



- ▶ **Prescription:** prescribing how people should talk and write and being pedantic about their language usage. Grammar Police adheres to prescriptivism (or Traditional Grammar).
- ▶ **Description:** describing a language as it is used by its native speakers. Modern Linguistics tries to be descriptive as much as possible.

# Approaches to Description

- ▶ Introspection: is when a linguist is a native speaker of the language they study, and they depend on their competence to carry out their research.
- ▶ Data analysis: when a linguist depends on data collected from native speakers (informant) of the language they are studying.

# Noam Chomsky

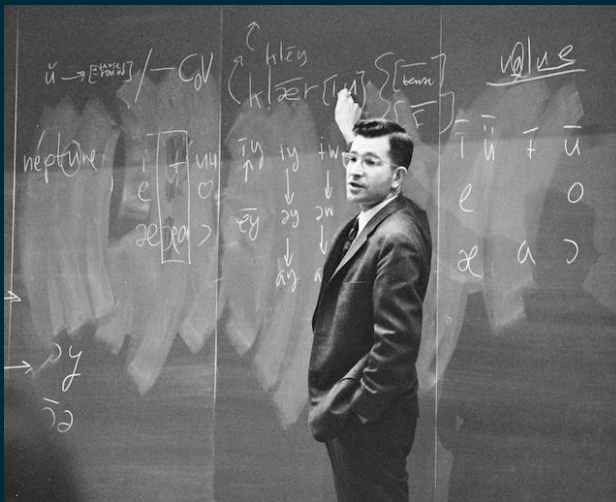


Figure: Modern Linguistics started with **Noam Chomsky**.

# Generative Linguistics

**The generativity of a language** is about creating an infinite number of sentences from a finite number phonemes, morphemes, "words" .

# Competence vs. Performance

- ▶ **Competence:** the internalized/innate knowledge of a language. (I-language)
- ▶ **Performance:** language use. (E-language)

# Language universals

**Universals** are the shared features found in all human languages.

## Some universals

1. Every language has consonants and vowels.
2. Almost all languages have a subject-predicate order.

# Micro level vs. Macro level analysis

- ▶ Micro level: concerned solely with the structures of the language system in itself and for itself. (narrower view)
  - ▶ Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics.
- ▶ Macro level: concerned with the way languages are acquired, stored in the brain and used for various functions. (broader view)
  - ▶ Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics...

# Diachronic vs. Synchronic analysis

- ▶ Diachronic: presents an account of the language as it is at some particular point in time.
- ▶ Synchronic: traces the historical development of the language. (Historical linguistics)



# The premises of a linguistic theory

- ▶ **Economy:** economic as much as possible.
- ▶ **Generalization:** a theory that is cross-linguistic.
- ▶ **Formality:** formalized through the use of a meta-language (such as Statistics) to produce an explicit and precise theory.
- ▶ **Explanatory adequacy:** accounts for the corpora, native speaker judgments and how the language is acquired by children. A theory that explains certain facts about a language.