

Foundations of Linguistics

MSc Language Science and Technology

Mareike Hartman, Bernd Möbius, Jia Loy & Annemarie Verkerk

Introduction

Preliminaries

Introductions

Who this course is for

BA in (Computational) Linguistics > don't take this course, take Foundations of Empirical Methods & Foundations in Mathematics;

BA/BSc in Psychology/Engineering/Computer Science > take this course.

Requirements: Exam 22-02-2024; 10.00-11.30, room on LSF

Assignments – get you bonus points!

Languages

What is linguistics?

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In this course, we will focus on the levels of description that deal with the structure of language:

- Phonetics

- Phonology

- Morphology

- Syntax

- Semantics

- Pragmatics

What isn't linguistics?

,Just words / just grammar'



What isn't linguistics?

„Just words / just grammar“

Prescriptivist



“In addition, *‘het’*-words are under pressure as many people start to turn them into *‘de’*-words, as in *‘de meisje’* or *‘een meisje die’*. “And that really does not only happen to speakers with a migration background,” says Van der Sijs. “With native Dutch people, regardless of their education, you also hear *‘een meisje die’*, or *‘een boek die’*. People deny saying it, but if you pay attention, you'll hear it everywhere. It is therefore obvious that we will also abolish the neuter gender in Dutch in the future. That fits seamlessly into the great historical development. *‘het’*-words are in any case strongly in the minority: 75 percent of Dutch words have the article *‘de’*.” Nicoline van der Sijs, *Trouw*, 10-10-2020

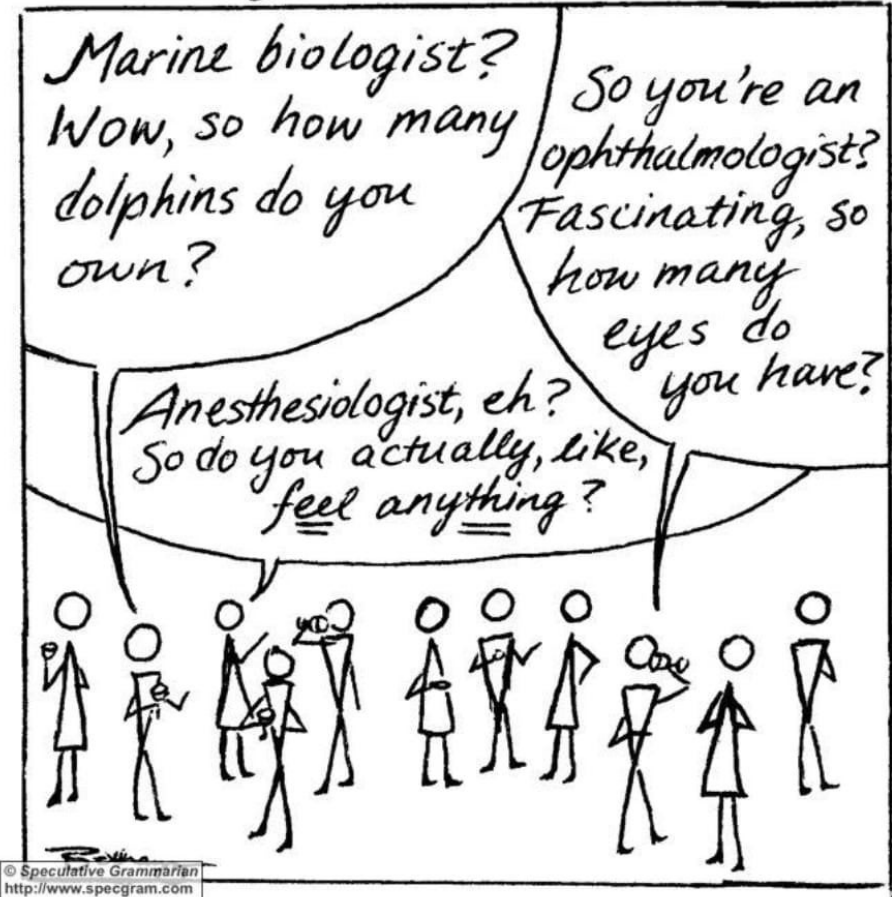
What isn't linguistics?

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Language learning

The linguists strike back



Language: disambiguation slide

- Structuralism: Language is a **self-contained formal system** in which elements (signs) can be defined through their relationships to other elements

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Language: disambiguation slide

- Structuralism: Language is a **self-contained formal system** in which elements (signs) can be defined through their relationships to other elements.
- Generative: Language is the uniquely human **capacity** for learning **a particular language** and for using it in complex communicative settings.
- Functionalism: language is first and foremost a **system of communication** that humans use to express themselves and communicate their needs to others.

What isn't language?

Animal language



(Sidenote on Productivity & Linguistic Competence)

- Productivity is the ability to produce and understand novel utterances, which cannot be explained by simple association or memorization;

“Pears that are purple are almost always painted.”

“There are no rainbow-colored moons.”

“My neighbour has about 100 different flags which he flies from the balcony.”

- Productivity must be subject to systematic constraints;
- Linguistic competence: Language users have subconscious knowledge regarding the grammar of their language.

What isn't language?

Animal language

Formal/Programming languages



python™



What isn't language?

Animal language

Formal/Programming languages

Conlangs



Where are we now and where did we come from

Linguistics is old:

- Writing systems (Sumerian cuneiform script, Egyptian hieroglyphs) emerged around 3200 BCE;
- Pāṇini writes Aṣṭādhyāyī, the first (remaining) grammar (on Vedic Sanskrit), around 300 BCE;
- Philosophers in Ancient Greek consider the relations between language, the world, and knowledge;
- Phonetics follows from interest in refining orthography (writing systems) in the Ancient World and later.

Where are we now and where did we come from

Linguistics is new:

- Discovery of sound laws by the Neogrammarians in late 19th century;
- Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in general linguistics*, published posthumously in 1916; start and further development of structuralism;
- Bloomfield took structuralism to the US, where it declined in favour of Chomsky's generative framework from about 1950 onwards;
- In Europe, Mathesius of the Prague School developed functionalism from the 1920s onwards;
- Structuralist/functionalist approaches have flourished into different theories (cognitive linguistics, construction grammar) and even entire subfields (pragmatics, sociolinguistics);
- In the last decades, the Minimalist program (1993) has been the dominant framework in generative linguistics.

Overview: Morphology and syntax

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
25.10.23	Introduction		
30.10.23	Morphology I: Word formation	Haspelmath & Sims (2010) Chapter 1&2&3	
01.11.23	Morphology II: Inflection & Derivation; Hierarchical structure	Haspelmath & Sims (2010) Chapter 5 & 7 (if you have time, read Chapter 6 too)	Morphology assignment handed out Have to find another slot for this class
06.11.23	Syntax I: Word classes	Tallerman (2014) Chapter 1&2&3	Morphology assignment due
08.11.23	Syntax II: Heads, dependents, and beyond	Tallerman (2014) Chapter 4&5	Syntax assignment handed out
13.11.23	Syntax III: Grammatical relations	Tallerman (2014) Chapter 6	
15.11.23	Syntax IV: tba	tba	Syntax assignment due

References

Allan, Keith, ed. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Aronoff, Mark, and Rees-Miller, Janie, eds. 2017. *The Handbook of Linguistics. Second Edition*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

McWhorter, John. 2008. *Understanding Linguistics: The Science of Language*. Chantilly: The Teaching Company.