Why Study English Linguistics?

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Knowledge of Language

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Neal Snape

• Children can learn languages rapidly and master a language at a very early age without receiving formal education in the language.

• Any human being can acquire a language naturally if he/she is brought up in an environment where it is spoken. This is referred to as language acquisition.

• What about animals? Do they have language?

Babbling

• BUT – children who acquire English or Japanese do not automatically start speaking the language perfectly.

• WHY NOT?

• What is ‘babbling’?

• ‘Babbling’ is what young children start doing from an early age.

• ‘Babbling’ is the child trying out the sounds of their language, like ‘da da’
Overgeneralization

- At a later stage children (around 3 to 4 years) produce certain types of errors.
  - e.g., *goed* for ‘went’
  - *foots* for ‘feet’

- Children (around 3 to 4 years) produce similar types of errors in Japanese.
  - e.g., パパが買ったのネクタイ for パパが買ったネクタイ

- Native speakers of English are able to detect the ambiguity of a phrase quite easily, without any effort.
  - e.g., *old men and women*

- This phrase can be understood in 2 ways:
  1. *old* applies to both men and women, e.g., *[old [men and women]]*
  2. *old* only applies to men, e.g., *[old men] and women]*

- The interpretations of *old men and women* can be represented as *syntactic structures*.

Universal Grammar (UG)

- Children by the age of 3-4 years already have a complex knowledge of language.

- BUT, how do children make sense of the language around them? How is it acquired?

- Chomsky’s theory, called generative grammar, has become very influential over the years.

- BUT, Chomsky’s ideas are not accepted by all language researchers. Some do not like the idea of isolating the study of grammar from the study of language.

- Other approaches to language emphasize the relation between language and psychological and perceptual abilities of human beings (cognitive linguistics) or actual use of language (pragmatics, sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics)

- Human beings are born with a special capacity for acquiring language (UG or the language faculty) according to Noam Chomsky.

- The human language faculty is innate -> this simply means all human beings are born with a natural system to acquire their first language.
What is English Linguistics?

- **Linguistics** is the scientific study of human language and aims to discover the following:
  
  a.) The nature of native speaker knowledge of language
  b.) How this knowledge is acquired by children (language acquisition)
  c.) How this knowledge is used in actual contexts (language use)

- Linguistics has many subfields
  - elements of language are **words**. You know how to pronounce words (the **sounds**) like milk, and cats and the **meaning** of them
  - but words form **sentences**. So, the following sentence is **grammatical**:
    - Cats like milk, but NOT *Milk like cats or *Cats milk like

Components of Grammar

- **morphology**: how words are made
- **semantics**: how words and sentences are understood
- **syntax**: how words are combined into phrases and sentences
- **phonetics** and **phonology**: how words and sentences are pronounced

- **School grammar** – written in textbooks and must be memorized

- Grammar that we study in this course is in the mind of native speakers and the researcher must discover what it is.

Subfields of linguistics

How English has been studied

- 19th century researchers were interested in the history of languages – sometimes called **philology** – a description and analysis of examples collected from written texts.

- Works in the early 20th century by grammarians like Otto Jespersen laid the foundation of **traditional grammar** or school grammar.
Neurolinguistics

- How is linguistic knowledge represented in the brain?
- The brain is an extremely complex organ, consisting of several ‘layers’.
- The layer which has evolved most recently and is most characteristic of human beings is the cerebral cortex, the folded surface of the cerebral hemispheres, which contains what is often referred to as grey matter.

- A language disorder resulting from brain damage is called aphasia, and a notable point is that this sort of brain damage almost always occurs in the left side of the brain (the left hemisphere).
- Damage to similar areas in the right hemisphere usually gives rise to entirely different deficits that have little to do with language. Aphasics who lose their language completely are said to suffer from global aphasia.
- In the first half of the 20th century, structural linguistics grew out of work by Ferdinand de Saussure in Europe and Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield in the U.S.
- When structural linguistics failed to progress further, a revolutionary breakthrough was achieved by the American linguist Noam Chomsky in his book *Syntactic Structures* (1957).

Psycholinguistics

- The psycholinguist addresses the question of how the mentally represented grammar (linguistic competence) is employed in the production and comprehension of speech (linguistic performance).

Sociolinguistics

- Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language use and the structure of society.
• It takes into account such factors as
  – the social backgrounds of both the speaker and the addressee (i.e. their age, sex, social class, ethnic background, degree of integration into their neighbourhood, etc.),
  – the relationship between speaker and addressee (good friends, employer–employee, teacher–pupil, grandmother–grandchild, etc.)
  – context and manner of the interaction (in bed, in the supermarket, in a TV studio, in church, loudly, whispering, over the phone, by fax, etc.),

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)
• SLA is the study of how second languages are learned. In other words, it is the study of the acquisition of a non-primary language; that is, the acquisition of a language beyond the native language.
• It is the study of how learners create a new language system with only limited exposure to a second language.

• It is the study of what is learned of a second language and what is not learned; it is the study of why most second language learners do not achieve the same degree of knowledge and proficiency in a second language as they do in their native language.
• It is also the study of why only some learners appear to achieve native-like proficiency in more than one language.

What is language?
• Linguistics is about languages, but what is a language? e.g., what is English?
  a) received pronunciation (RP)
  b) an English dialect, e.g. Scottish English, American English, etc.
  c) texts by William Shakespeare: “She likes not cheese”.
  d) English spoken by children: “see sheeps”.
  e) English spoken by non-native speakers: “John kisses often Mary”.
• Which one from a to e is English?
• Since a language, e.g. English is not a scientific term, we must refer to another notion of language in order to do linguistics, namely I-language.
• What is in your brain/mind which enables you to do your L1?
• Internal Language (I-language) vs. External Language (E-language).
• The proper object of our enquiry in linguistics. I-language is a scientific term, since it is a biological and mental object.
• I-language is a cognitive biological perspective of language.
• Language must be studied as a cognitive system/structure.
• Linguistic COMPETENCE vs. Linguistic PERFORMANCE

Experience of L → Language Faculty → Grammar of L

Justifications
• Since the child’s language experience is not sufficient to acquire the grammar which can generate infinite sets of strings of words (poverty of the stimulus), there must be more than just memorising the utterances they are exposed to.
• The adult grammar is uniform and the acquisition process is rapid.
• The speaker of L instantly identifies unacceptable combinations of words and phrases or errors of L.

Exercises
• What does it mean to know a language?
• Get into pairs and discuss with your partner whether it is ‘I-language’ or ‘E-language’ in the following examples:

1. Mark was born in Yorkshire and grew up in Yorkshire. He used to speak the local dialect, but now, after many years in Essex, he no longer speaks the dialect.

2. Native speakers of English know:
   *What does he like fish and? *He talk yesterday hour an?

3. Speech errors: ‘a pope smiker’ ‘get a cash checked’

4. The ability of Marie, whose L1 is French, to speak many foreign languages, such as English, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Japanese.

5. Joe, whose parents are French, was born in London and grew up in Oxford. She speaks English and French and is a bilingual.

6. ‘Language’ in the animal kingdom:
   a)dolphins and whales
   b)bees
   c)primates being taught sign language
7. Analyse the following utterances produced by Ruth, a ten-year-old with language problems (from Chiat 2000). How do her sentences differ from those of normal adult speakers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruth’s utterances</th>
<th>Reconstruction of targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.) Me borrow mum camera</td>
<td>I’ll borrow mum’s camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.) I ring you last time</td>
<td>I rang you last time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.) We walk up</td>
<td>We walked up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.) You and me getting married</td>
<td>You and me are getting married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.) Us going on Friday</td>
<td>We are going on Friday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>