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**General features of language**

**applied linguistics** The application of insights from theoretical linguistics to practical matters such as language teaching, remedial linguistic therapy, language planning or whatever.

**arbitrariness** An essential notion in structural linguistics which denies any necessary relationship between linguistic signs and their referents, e.g. objects in the outside world.

**areas of linguistics** Any of a number of areas of study in which linguistic insights have been brought to bear, for instance sociolinguistics in which scholars study society and the way language is used in it. Other examples are psycholinguistics which is concerned with the psychological and linguistic development of the child.

**competence** According to Chomsky in his *Aspects of the theory of syntax* (1965) this is the abstract ability of an individual to speak the language which he/she has learned as native language in his/her childhood. The competence of a speaker is unaffected by such factors as nervousness, temporary loss of memory, speech errors, etc. These latter phenomena are entirely within the domain of *performance* which refers to the process of applying one's competence in the act of speaking. Bear in mind that competence also refers to the ability to judge if a sentence is grammatically well-formed; it is an unconscious ability.

**context** A term referring to the environment in which an element (sound, word, phrase) occurs. The context may determine what elements may be present, in which case one says that there are 'co-occurrence restrictions' for instance 1) /r/ may not occur after /s/ in a syllable in English, e.g. \*/sri:n/ is not phonotactically permissible in English; 2) the progressive form cannot occur with stative verbs, e.g. *We are knowing German* is not well-formed in English.

**contrast** A difference between two linguistic items which can be exploited systematically. The distinction between the two forms arises from the fact that these can occupy one and the same slot in a syntagm, i.e. they alternate paradigmatically, e.g. the different inflectional forms of verbs contrast in both English and German. Forms which contrast are called *distinctive*. This can apply to sounds as well, for instance /p/ and /b/ contrast in English as minimal pairs such as *pin* /pɪn/ : *bin* /bɪn/ show.

**convention** An agreement, usually reached unconsciously by speakers in a community, that relationships are to apply between linguistic items, between these and the outside world or to apply in the use of rules in the grammar of their language.

**creativity** An accepted feature of human language — deriving from the phenomenon of sentence generation — which accounts for speakers' ability to produce and to understand a theoretically infinite number of sentences.

**descriptive** An approach to linguistics which is concerned with saying what language is like and not what it should be like (prescriptivism).

**diachronic** Refers to language viewed over time and contrasts with *synchronic* which refers to a point in time. This is one of the major structural distinctions introduced by Saussure and which is used to characterise types of linguistic investigation.

**displacement** One of the key characteristics of human language which enables it to refer to situations which are not here and now, e.g. *I studied linguistics in London when I was in my twenties*.

**duality of patterning** A structural principle of human language whereby larger units consist of smaller building blocks, the number of such blocks being limited but the combinations being almost infinite. For instance all words consist of combinations of a limited number of sounds, say about 40 in either English or German. Equally all sentences consist of structures from a small set with different words occupying different points in the structures allowing for virtually unlimited variety.

**economy** A principle of linguistic analysis which demands that rules and units are to be kept to a minimum, i.e. every postulated rule or unit must be justified linguistically by capturing a generalisation about the language being analysed, if not about all languages.

**extralinguistic** Any phenomenon which lies outside of language. An extralinguistic reason for a linguistic feature would be one which is not to be found in the language itself.

**figurative** Any use of a word in a non-literal sense, e.g. *at the foot of the mountain* where *foot* is employed figuratively to indicate the bottom of the mountain. Figurative usage is the source of the second meaning of polysemous words.

**formalist** An adjective referring to linguistic analyses which lay emphasis on relatively abstract conceptions of language structure.

**general linguistics** A broad term for investigations which are concerned with the nature of language, procedures of linguistic analysis, etc. without considering to what use these can be put. It contrasts explicitly with *applied linguistics*.

**generative** A reference to a type of linguistic analysis which relies heavily on the formulation of rules for the exhaustive description (generation) of the sentences of a language.

**head** The centre of a phrase or sentence which is possibly qualified by further optional elements, in the phrase *these bright new signs* the head is *signs* as all other elements refer to it and are optional. The term is also used in lexicology to refer to the determining section of a compound; in *family tree*, the element *tree* is head and *family* is modifier. This has consequences for grammar, especially in synthetic languages, such as German where in a compound like *Stammbuch* the gender is neuter (with *das*) because the head *Buch* is although the modifying word is masculine (*der Stamm*).

**hierarchy** Any order of elements from the most central or basic to the most peripheral, e.g. a hierarchy of word classes in English would include nouns and verbs at the top and elements like adjectives and adverbs further down with conjunctions and subordinators still further down. The notions of top and bottom are intended in a metaphorical sense.

**idealisation** A situation where the linguist chooses to ignore details of language use for reasons of greater generalisation.

**language** A system which consists of a set of symbols (sentences) — realised phonetically by sounds — which are used in a regular order to convey a certain meaning. Apart from these formal characteristics, definitions of languages tend to highlight other aspects such as the fact that language is used regularly by humans and that it has a powerful social function.

**lay speaker** A general term to refer to an individual who does not possess linguistic training and who can be taken to be largely unaware of the structure of language.

**level** A reference to a set of recognisible divisions in the structure of natural language. These divisions are largely independent of each other and are characterised by rules and regularities of organisation. Traditionally five levels are recognised: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics. Pragmatics may also be considered as a separate level from semantics. Furthermore levels may have subdivisions as is the case with morphology which falls into inflectional and derivational morphology (the former is concerned with grammatical endings and the latter with processes of word-formation). The term 'level' may also be taken to refer to divisions within syntax in generative grammar.

**linguistics** The study of language. As a scientific discipline built on objective principles, linguistics did not develop until the beginning of the 19th century. The approach then was historical as linguists were mainly concerned with the reconstruction of the Indo-European language. With the advent of structuralism at the beginning of the 20th century, it became oriented towards viewing language at one point in time. The middle of this century saw a radically new approach — known as generative grammar — which stressed our unconscious knowledge of language and underlying structures to be found in all languages.

**linguistic determinism** Refers to the view, propounded by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, that language determines the way in which people think. Also termed the *linguistic relativity hypothesis.*

**marked** A term used to state that a particular form is statistically unusual or unexpected in a certain context. For instance zero plurals in English such as *sheep* or *deer* are marked.

**metalanguage** The language which is used to discuss language; see also *object language*.

**metaphor** An application of a word to another with which it is figuratively but not literally associated, e.g. *food for thought*. This process is very common in the use of language and may lead to changes in grammar as with the verb *go* in English where its spatial meaning has come to be used metaphorically for temporal contexts as in *He's going to learn Russian*.

**onomastics** The linguistic study of names, both personal and place names. This field is particularly concerned with etymology and with the general historical value of the information which names offer the linguist.

**paradigm** The set of forms belonging to a particular word-class or member of a word-class. A paradigm can be thought of as a vertical list of forms which can occupy a slot in a syntagm. Pronounced [ˡpærədaim].

**parameter** Any aspect of language which can obtain a specific value in a given language, e.g. canonical word-order which can have the verb in a declarative sentence either before the subject, after the subject or after both subject and object. Contrast *principle* in this respect.

**performance** The actual production of language as opposed to the knowledge about the structure of one's native language which a speaker has internalised during childhood (*see* Competence).

**productivity** A reference to the extent that a given process is *not* bound in its application to a certain input. For instance the prefixation of *re-* to verbs in modern English is productive because this can be done with practically all verbs, e.g. *re-think*, *re-do*, *re-write*. The term also refers — in syntax — to the ability of speakers to produce an unlimited number of sentences using a limited set of structures.

**psychological reality** The extent to which the constructs of linguistic theory can be taken to have a basis in the human mind, i.e. to somehow be reflected in human cognitive structures. Many linguists are divided on this issue, one extreme claiming that this requirement of a theory is not necessary, other saying that it is the ultimate test of any respectable theory.

**reflexiveness** The possibility of using language to talk about language; this is one of its delimiting characteristics with respect to other communication systems.

**rhetoric** The technique of speaking effectively in public. Regarded in the past as an art and cultivated deliberately.

**root** 1) In grammar the unalterable core of a word to which all suffixes are added, e.g. *friend* in *un-friend-li-ness*. 2) In etymology, the earliest form of a word. 3) In phonetics, the part of the tongue which lies furthest back in the mouth.

**Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** The notion that thought is determined by language. While few linguists nowadays accept this strict link, there would seem to be some truth to the postulation of the two American anthropologists/linguists.

**sign language** A communication system in which people use their hands to convey signals. In recent years sign language has been the object of linguists' attention and has come to be regarded as a fully-fledged system comparable to natural language with those individuals who are congenitally deaf and who learn sign language from childhood.

**structuralism** A type of linguistic analysis which stresses the interrelatedness of all levels and sub-levels of language. It was introduced at the beginning of the century by Ferdinand de Saussure (1957-1913) as a deliberate reaction to the historically oriented linguistics of the 19th century and subsequently established itself as the standard paradigm until the 1950's when it was joined, if not replaced, by generative grammar.

**synchronic** A reference to one point of time in a language. This may be the present but need not be. Forms a dichotomy with *diachronic*. Structural studies of language are usually synchronic and the Indo-Europeanists of the 19th century were diachronic in their approach.

**taxonomic** A reference to linguistics in which the main aim is to list and classify features and phenomena. It is usually implied that no attempt for linguistic generalisations is made.

**theoretical linguistics** The study of the structure of language without any concern for practical applications which might arise from one's work.

**underlying representation** A representation of what is assumed by the linguist to be the structure which lies behind or forms the initial stage in the generation of a surface structure item. For instance one could say that /di:b/ is the underlying representation for German 'thief' and that the surface form [di:p] arises through the application of an automatic rule of final devoicing.

**unproductive** Refers to a process which is bound to specific lexemes and hence cannot be used at will by speakers, e.g. umlaut is an unproductive process in German because it cannot be applied in plural formation with new words. Unproductive processes can nonetheless be statistically common, again umlaut is unproductive but occurs with words which have a high frequency in German because they belong to the core of the language — mainly names of beings, parts of the body, etc.

**zero** Any element which is postulated by the linguist but which has no realisation in language, e.g. the plural morpheme which some linguists might assume to be present, but not realised, in a word like *die Wagen*.

**zoosemiotics** The investigation of communications systems used by animals.

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**Phonetics and phonology**

*Phonetics* is the study of human sounds.  
*Phonology* is the study of the sound system of a language or languages.

**affricate** A phonetic segment which consists of a stop followed immediately by a fricative. Affricates act as units phonologically and are synchronically indivisible, e.g. /tʃ/ in *church* /tʃɜ:tʃ/ or *judge* /dʒʌdʒ/.

**allophone** The realisation of a phoneme. Each segment has different realisations which are only partly distinguishable for speakers. A phoneme can have different allophones, frequently depending on position in the word or on a preceding vowel, e.g. [l] and [ɫ] in English (at the beginning and end of a word respectively) or [ç] and [x] in German (depending on whether the preceding vowel is front or not). Allophones are written in square brackets.

**alphabet** A system of letters intended to represent the sounds of a language in writing. For all west European languages the Latin alphabet has been the outset for their writing systems. However, because each language has a different sound system different combinations of letters have arisen and letters have come to be written with additional symbols attached to them.

**alveolar** A classification of sounds which are formed at the alveolar ridge (the bone plate behind the upper teeth). Alveolar sounds are formed with the tip or the blade of the tongue. Examples are /t,d,s,z,l,n/ in English or German.

**alveolo-palatal** A classification of sounds which are formed with the hard palate as passive articulator and the blade of the tongue as active articulator. Examples are the two English fricatives [ʃ] and [ʒ].

**ambi-dental** A description of the manner of articulation of the Modern English fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. It is preferred to *inter-dental* as the tongue is not usually positioned between the teeth for these sounds.

**articulatory phonetics** One of three standard divisions of phonetics which concerns itself with the production of sounds (compare acoustic and auditive phonetics).

**auditory phonetics** One of the three standard divisions of phonetics which is concerned with the perception of sounds.

**bilabial** Any sound produced using both lips, e.g. [p] oder [m].

**cardinal vowels** A system of 8 rounded and 8 unrounded vowels which was originally developed by the English phonetician Daniel Jones and which is intended as a system of reference for the unambiguous classification of vowel values in a language. The cardinal vowels are represented in a quadrangle with vowels at each corner and two closed mid and open mid vowels, a pair in the front and a pair in the back of the quadrangle.

**consonant** One of the two main classes of sound. Consonants are formed by a constriction in the supra-glottal tract (or occasionally at the vocal folds as with the glottal stop [ʔ]). They divide into the chief types stops — /p,t,k/ for instance, fricatives — /f, θ, s/ — and approximants — /j, w/. Consonants contrast with vowels in their relatively low sonority and are hence found typically in the margins of syllables, i.e. in onsets and codas as in *stopped* /stɒpt/.

**contrastive** Refers to any elements which are in opposition to each other. A phonetic distinction is contrastive if it has significance on the phonological level, i.e. if it distinguishes meaning.

**dental** A place of articulation characterised by the tip of the tongue being held against the back of the upper teeth, for instance in the pronunciation of /t,d/ in Italian, Swedish, etc. Indicated by a subscript diacritic representing a tooth, i.e. [ṯ, ḏ]. The initial sounds in English *this* and *think* are sometime referred to as dental fricatives but the description ambi-dental is more appropriate as the tip of the tongue need only be in the region of the teeth.

**diphthong** A vowel which is articulated with a change in tongue position between the beginning and end, e.g. /ai/ in English or German. Not all diphthongs have phonological status in a language. Historically, diphthongs tend to develop from long vowels.

**discrete** A characteristic of human language where there is no continuous transition from one unit to another, e.g. /p/ and /b/ are separate, discrete sounds and speakers pronounce one or the other but not something intermediary between the two.

**ease of articulation** A putative reason for sound change. It may play a role in allegro speech and possibly effect the sound system over time but cannot be assumed to be a generally valid principle on the phonological level.

**fricative** A type of sound which is characterised by air passing a constriction somewhere between the glottis and the lips, e.g. [x, s, ʃ, f]. Turbulence arises when air flows through a narrow gap and it is this which causes the noise typical of fricatives. Fricatives can be voiced or voiceless. The equivalent term *spirant* is sometimes found.

**glide** A sound which from the point of view of phonological classification lies between a vowel and a consonant, e.g. /j/ and /w/ in English. It is formed with little friction and has a high degree of sonority which accounts for why glides are found near the nucleus of syllables. Sometimes called a semi-vowel.

**glottal** A term referring to sounds produced at the gap in the vocal folds. Such sounds can either be stops [ʔ] or fricatives [h, ɦ] — voiceless and voiced respectively.

**homophone** Any set of words pronounced the same way, e.g. English *poor* and *pour* /pɔ:/ (Received Pronunciation) and German *Ferse* and *Verse*.

**homorganic** Any set of sounds which are articulated at the same point in the vocal tract, e.g. the sounds in the syllable-coda of *mind* /maind/ both of which are alveolar.

**intonation** That part of the sound system of a language which involves the use of pitch to convey information. It consists of both accent (concerns individual words) and sentence melody (concerns word groups).

**IPA** A system of transcribing the sounds of languages which consists of some Latin and Greek letters and a variety of additional symbols and diacritics. The goal is to represent each recognisable sound in a unique fashion. The IPA was developed at the end of the last century; the acronym stands for *International Phonetic Alphabet*.

**labial** A reference to a sound which is formed at the lips; this encompasses both bilabials like /p, m/ and labio-dentals like /f, v/.

**labio-dental** Describes a consonant which is formed by the lower lip making contact with the upper teeth as in English and German [f] and [v].

**labio-velar** Describes a consonant which is articulated by a constriction at the velum with rounding of the lips at the same time, e.g. with [w] in English.

**levelling** The disappearance of contrasts — usually phonological or morphological — in the course of a language's development.

**manner of articulation** One of the three conventional parameters (the others are place of articulation and voice) which are used to specific how a sound is produced. Common types are plosives, fricatives and affricates.

**minimal pair** Any two words which are only distinguished by different sounds in a single position. Such word pairs are used in traditional phonology to determine the status of sounds as phonemes, e.g. German *Kunst* # *Gunst* and English *railing* # *sailing* which show that the initial sounds in all these words are phonemes in the respective languages. Note that the spelling of minimal pairs is irrelevant.

**monophthong** A vowel which is articulated with the tongue in a constant position, e.g. /o:/ in German *Boot*. Most long vowels in German are monophthongs while those in English are diphthongs, e.g. [bəʊt] for *boat*.

**nasal** A sound, vowel or consonant, which is produced by opening the nasal cavity (through lowering of the velum).

**natural class** A group of sounds which behave similarly. An example would be the group of obstruents (stops and fricatives) as only these are affected by final devoicing in German.

**onomatopoeia** The putative imitation of a natural phenomenon (for instance bird song) by phonetic means. Contrary to the opinion of many speakers, onomatopoeia is not a major principle in historical phonology.

**optional** A term which refers to allophonic processes which do not necessarily have to be carried out, cf. the shortening of high vowels before nasals as in Received Pronunciation *room* /ru:m/ > /rum/ or *been* /bi:n/ > /bɪn/; in general terms any process which is not obligatory.

**oral** Articulated in the mouth. The term usually implies that the nasal cavity is not involved, e.g. in French there are distinct oral and nasal vowels.

**organs of speech** Parts of the human anatomy which are used in speech production, e.g the glottis, velum, palate, alveolar ridge, lips and the tongue of course. From an evolutionary point of view one can see that these functions are secondary adaptations and specialisations of organs which have some other primary function.

**palatal** A place of articulation at the hard palate in the centre of the roof of the mouth.

**phone** Any human sound which has not been classified in the phonology of a language.

**phoneme** In traditional phonology the smallest unit in language which disinguishes meaning, e.g /k/ and /g/ as seen in *coat* and *goat*. Each phoneme has one or more realisations, called allophones.

**phonemics** The study of phonemes in language, their distribution, status and interrelationships.

**phonetic** A reference to a phenomenon in the area of phonetics (often as opposed to phonology).

**phonetics** The study of human sounds without immediate regard to their systematic status for a certain language.

**phonological** A reference to the phonology of a language, i.e. to the deeper and more abstract organisation of the sounds of a language. A language's phonology is its inventory of phonemes and the rules for their combination, distribution, etc.; in short all the 'grammatical' or structural aspects of the sound level. In a wider sense, phonology could be said to subsume phonetics as its 'surface' aspect.

**phonology** The study of the sound system of one or more languages. Phonology involves the classification of sounds and a description of the interrelationship of the elements on a systematic level.

**place of articulation** The point in the vocal tract at which a sound is produced. This can be anywhere from the lips at the front to the glottis (the gap between the vocal folds) at the back. The most common place of articulation is the alveolar ridge just behind the upper teeth.

**plosive** A sound which is produced with a complete blockage of the pulmonic airstream. Also called a stop, examples are /p,t,k/.

**pronunciation** A collective reference to the manner in which sounds are articulated in a particular language. Given its concrete nature pronunciation is a matter of phonetics rather than phonology.

**prosody** A term which refers to all the suprasegmental properties of language such as pitch, loudness, tempo and rhythym.

**Received Pronunciation** The standard pronunciation of British English. This stems originally from the speech of the middle and upper classes in London. In the course of the 19th century it developed into a sociolect, particularly when adopted by the *public schools*, and attained a wide distribution in Wales and Scotland as well. The term was coined by the English phonetician Daniel Jones.

**redundancy** Superfluous information in language. Multiple marking of grammatical categories is the most common case of redundancy and is often found in German, e.g. the plural *Dörfer* which takes both an ending *-er* and a shift in stem vowel from back to front (umlaut).

**rhotic** A reference to a variety of a language in which a syllable-final /r/ is pronounced, for instance (generally) in American English as opposed to Received Pronunciation in England.

**rhythm** All the patterns of strong and weak syllables in a language. The rhythym of English (and German) is characterised by the foot which consists of a stressed syllable and all unstressed syllables up to the next stressed one.

**segment** A unit of speech which is identifiable and separate from others. It contrasts with the term *suprasegmental* which refers to those aspects of phonetic structure above the level of individual sounds.

**sibilant** A sound which is pronounced with clear, hissing friction which is reminiscent of either /s/ or /ʃ/.

**speech** The production of sounds using the organs of speech; contrasts directly with writing which is a secondary medium for communication via language.

**stop** A consonant which is formed by blocking off the airstream completely, e.g. /p, t, k/. It contrasts directly with a fricative which does not involve an interruption of the airstream.

**stress** The acoustic prominence of a syllable in a word. The physical correlates of stress can vary. Typically it involves the raising of the basic frequency and/or of volume matched by a prolongation of the syllable involved.

**structure** A network of connections between elements of a system, for instance syllable structure is the set of relations which exist between parts of a syllable.

**suprasegmental** A reference to phenomena which do not belong to the sound segments of language but which typically are spread over several segments, e.g. intonation, stress, tempo, etc.

**syllable** The most important structural unit in phonology. A syllable consists of a series of sounds which are grouped around a nucleus of acoustic prominence (usually a vowel). A closed syllable is one which has a coda, an open syllable has a codaless rhyme: *got* /gɒt/ versus *go* /gəʊ/.

**syntagmatic** A reference to the linear (or temporal) sequence of elements which contrasts directly with the vertical axis — the paradigmatic axis.

**tongue** The most frequently used active articulator in all languages. The tongue can be divided into the following areas: the tip (Latin *apex*), blade (Latin *lamina*), back (Latin *dorsum*). The distinction between tip and blade is important for the production of dental and alveolar sounds. The tongue may also show a groove, for instance with palato-alveolar fricatives such as /ʃ, ʒ/. The tip can be made to roll in the escaping air-stream as is the case with the apical rolled /r/ of many Romance languages and in many southern varieties of German. The root of the tongue can be retracted in order to achieve a constriction of the larynx as with the so-called 'emphatic' sounds of Arabic.

**transcription** A system of representing sounds in writing unambiguously. For phonological purposes a broad transcription is sufficient as long as the systemic distinctions in the particular language can be recognised. A narrow transcription is more typical of phonetics and may also be necessary in phonology where a feature relies on a phonetic basis which has to be specified. In English it is sufficient to transcribe /r/ as [r], although a narrow transcription would demand [ɻ] as strictly speaking [r] refers to an apical trill as in Spanish *perro* [pero] ‘dog”.

**voiced** Spoken with simultaneous vibration of the vocal folds.

**voiceless** Spoken without the vocal folds vibrating; the folds can either be open (the normal state) or closed with the compression of air between them and the supra-glottal stop position producing sounds which are called *ejectives*.

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**Morphology**

*Morphology* is the study of the words as they express grammatical categories.

**allomorph** A non-distinctive variant of a morpheme, e.g. *-keit* and *-heit* in German (*Heiterkeit*, *Schönheit*) which vary according to the final consonant of the base to which they are suffixed but share the same grammatical function of nominal derivation.

**article** A grammatical word — or affix — used to specify a noun as definite or indefinite. It may vary for gender and case in languages with gender distinctions and a formal case system such as German.

**bound** In a general sense any form which cannot occur on its own. Both lexical and grammatical morphemes may be bound, but the number of the former is very limited, e.g. the first part of *raspberry* in English which does not occur independently.

**case** An inflection which indicates the relationship of a noun to other elements in a sentence, e.g. the dative in German which broadly indicates the beneficiary of an action: *Sie hat ihm versprochen*, *nach Hause zu kommen*. There are, however, many instances in which case requirements are not semantically motivated, e.g. *gratulieren*, *imponieren* with the dative as opposed to *beglückwünschen*, *beeindrucken* with the accusative.

**closed class** A term which refers to any linguistic level whose elements form a relatively small number which is not altered by the individual speaker. For instance phonemes, grammatical morphemes and syntactic structures are a closed set but the lexicon is definitely an open class as it is continuously expanding.

**declension** A term which refers to the inflections of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, i.e. of nouns and the elements which can qualify them. The set of inflections is called a nominal paradigm. The term *declension* can also be used for classes of nouns which conform to a certain paradigm. It is the equivalent with nouns of the term *conjugation* with verbs.

**definite article** A grammatical word which marks a following noun for definiteness. Not every language has such an element, though it is more common for the indefinite article to be missing. Languages furthermore vary according to whether they demand the definite article when nouns are used generically. This is a major difference between English and German, cf. *He is interested in philosophy*. *Er interessiert sich für die Philosophie*.

**degree** A relational specification which is found with adjectives and adverbs. There are three degrees: 1) positive as in *small*, 2) comparative as in *smaller* and 3) superlative as in *smallest*.

**empty morph** In some morphological analyses, an element which is posited as the carrier of a grammatical category but not present on the surface, for instance the word *sheep* could be said to contain an empty plural morph: *sheep* + Ø.

**function word** A word which serves the purpose of indicating a grammatical category or relationship. It contrasts explicitly with a content word which has lexical meaning.

**inflection** An alteration made to a word to indicate a certain grammatical category, e.g. number and case with nouns or person, number and tense with verbs. The number of inflections in a language can be taken as an indication of its type, a large number being characteristic of synthetic languages. Diachronically inflections arise from clitics which become unseparable from the lexical bases to which they are attached.

**irregular** A form which can be regarded as an exception to a given pattern or rule, e.g. the plurals formed with a stem vowel change in Modern English, *man* : *men*, *tooth* : *teeth*.

**morph** Any item of language which cannot be broken down any further without a loss of meaning. A morph usually realises a morpheme, the unit of grammar on an abstract level, e.g. /ʌn/ in *undoable* but also /ɪm/ in *impossible*.

**morpheme** The smallest unit in a grammar which can contrast with another and which carries meaning. A morpheme can be an inflection, e.g. /ri:-/ in *rewrite* or a lexical word, *house*, *tree*, *sick*. A morpheme is an abstract unit and is realised by a morph; it is the approximate equivalent of a phoneme on the level of phonology.

**morphology** The level of linguistics which is concerned with the structure of words, both from the point of view of inflections and of word-formation. It is traditionally located between phonology (the level of sounds) and syntax (the level of sentences).

**noun** One of the major parts of speech which refers to objects in the non-linguistic world or to notions which are regarded as forming entities parallel to real-world objects, e.g. by showing the property of countability.

**number** A grammatical category which refers to quantity, usually along a binary axis, singular vs. plural, although some languages have other number distinctions involving a dual or a paucal category (referring to a few items).

**person** A grammatical distinction which applies to the speaker, addressee or person talked about in verbal systems. Normally there is a distinction between singular and plural as well. There are more distinctions available than just those found in European languages, for instance languages may distinguish between a personal form for 'we' which includes the addressee and one which does not.

**personal pronoun** A grammatical form which refers to the speaker, addressee or person talked about and which occupies a position immediately next to the verb. In discourse it is used to avoid repetition of a name which has already been mentioned.

**plural** A category in the grammar of all languages which refers to more than one object. All languages have a particular means for expressing this category, frequently by using a characteristic inflection.

**pronoun** A grammatical element which refers to a noun previously mentioned; as such it has a deictic or anaphoric function as in *The lecturer was here and he spoke to us on a special topic*.

**singular** A grammatical category which indicates a single occurrence of something. This is taken as the unmarked or normal instance in language, the plural, or even more so the dual, being marked forms, usually with special inflections characterising them.

**stem** A part of a word to which prefixes and/or suffixes can be added. It is normally unalterable, though some morphological processes, such as umlaut in German, may change it. It is usually used synonymously with *root*.

**suffix** Any element attached to the right- hand side of a stem. Suffixation in one of the major operations in morphology and is undertaken to indicate grammatical categories as in *stone* : *stone-s* where the *-s* is a plural marker suffix.

**suppletion** A form in a paradigm (a set of morphologically related elements, such as the forms of a verb or noun) which etymologically comes from another source, e.g. the past tense form *went* in English is not formally related to the verb *go.*

**verb** One of the two major lexical categories — the other is that of nouns — which is used to express a state or an action. The set of inflectional forms of a verb is termed a *conjugation* (parallel to *declension* with nouns). Verbs are usually distinguished for person and number along with tense and mood and frequently for aspect as well.

**word class** A group of words which are similar in their grammatical characteristics: the kinds of inflections they take, their distribution in sentences and the relations they enter with other sets of words. Typically word classes are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions.

**word** A general term for a morphological form which is internally stable, can stand on its own and which in principle can be moved to a new position in a sentence. In a synthetic language like German inflected words tend to be morphologically complex whereas in an analytic language like English these are usually simpler in structure.

**zero derivation** The transfer of an element of one word class into another without any formal alteration. This is particularly common in English today, e.g. *breakfast* (noun) > *to breakfast* (verb). Another name for this phenomenon is *conversion*.

[](https://www.uni-due.de/ELE/LinguisticGlossary.html#GlossTop)

**Lexicology**

*Lexicology* is the study of the structure of the lexicon.

**base** A free lexical word to which one or more endings can be added. A base can itself consist of more than one morpheme whereas a root contains only one.

**citation form** The form of a linguistic item which is given when it occurs on its own. Often the form used for a dictionary entry, typically the nominative of nouns and the infinitive of verbs (in English and German).

**compound** A term from derivational morphology, i.e. a lexicological term, which refers to a word which contains more than one lexical morpheme. This word is thus a new word which is gained by combining two or more morphologically simpler words, e.g. *girlfriend* from *girl* and *friend*, *teabreak* from *tea* and *break*. The term is occasionally used in syntax, as in 'a compound sentence', when referring to a sentence which consists of clauses which in turn could function as sentences on their own.

**conversion** The use of an item of one class in another without any formal change, e.g. *to breakfast* from *breakfast*. Conversion is a common feature of analytical languages such as English.

**lexeme** The smallest (abstract) unit which is recognised as semantically independent in the lexicon of a language. A lexeme subsumes a set of forms which are related semantically, e.g. the lexeme walk unites the various forms *walk*, *walks*, *walked*, *walking*.

**lexical** 1) Pertaining to the vocabulary of a language and/or information which is deposited in the mental lexicon of the speaker. 2) Irregular, 'quirky', not conforming to a given pattern. This second use implies that a form cannot be derived by rule and hence it must be learned as an indivisible whole during language acquisition and stored in the lexicon in its full, unalterable form.

**lexicon** The vocabulary of a language. It can refer to the book form of a dictionary (usually with an alphabetic listing of words) or the assumed lexicon which speakers possess mentally. The precise nature and organisation of this mental lexicon is much debated in linguistic literature as it is generally assumed to be radically different in organisation from a conventional dictionary.

**loan-word** Any word which can be shown to have been imported from one language into another, that is which does not represent an historical continuation of an earlier form (although loan-words may be related at a greater time depth). The word *cardiac* is a Greek loan as it is derived from the word for 'heart' in the latter language although it is ultimately related to English *heart* as both stem from the same root in Indo-European \**kerd*.

**neologism** A new word in the vocabulary of a language. Frequently a borrowing but not necessarily so.

**opaque** A term referring to any form or process which cannot be spontaneously understood by lay speakers. One could say that the word *gospel* is opaque for English speakers as they do not normally know that it comes from *good* + *spell*.

**thesaurus** A kind of dictionary which consists of words grouped according to similarity in meaning.

**transparent** A reference to a form or a process in morphology whose structure can be understood without any additional information, particularly of an historical nature, from the language concerned. For instance the German compound *Kinderarzt* is transparent but English *pediatrician*, which is derived from the Greek word for 'child' is not so. Former transparent compounds may change in the course of time. The English word *hussey* is a reduced form of 'housewife' and because of loss of transparency underwent a semantic shift to 'unpleasant woman' with the transparent *housewife* being re-introduced into the language. *Transparent* contrasts directly with *opaque*.

**type** A reference to a unique word in a text, e.g. there are 6 types — but 8 tokens — in the following sentence: *The young girl spoke to the older girl* because the words *the* and *girl* occur twice.

**vocabulary** The set of words in a language. These are usually grouped into word fields so that the vocabulary can be said to show an internal structure. The term *lexicon* is also found here but the latter has two meanings (the words of a language and one's mental storehouse for these words).

**word formation** The second main branch of morphology (the other being inflection) and the chief process in lexicology (the study of the vocabulary of a language). Word formational processes are closely connected to a language's type: German as a synthetic language has much compounding but English as an analytic language has somewhat less, though in this sphere a tendency towards complex formations is noticeable, e.g. *part-financed*, *low-intensity*, *small-scale*.

[](https://www.uni-due.de/ELE/LinguisticGlossary.html#GlossTop)

**Syntax**

*Syntax* is the study of sentence structure.

**accusative** In an inflectional language the formal marking of the direct object of a verb. A similar marking may be used after prepositions. As a term from traditional Latin grammar the term is inappropriate to modern English as the latter does not have any corresponding inflection.

**active** A reference to a type of sentence in which the semantic subject is also the formal subject; contrasts with passive in which this is not the case. This type is generally taken as more basic than a passive sentence.

**adjective** A word class which generally qualifies a noun. Because of this adjectives are found either before (in SVO languages) or after (in VSO languages) the noun they refer to. Adjectives in this position are termed 'attributive' while those placed after a copula are called 'predicative' as in *The snow is very dry*. Adjectives can themselves be qualified by adverbs (as in the example just given).

**adverb** A word class which encompasses those elements which qualify verbs/verb phrases (*She smiled slyly*) or nouns/noun phrases (*A remarkably good linguist*). The category is somewhat fuzzy and tends to be used as a bin for elements which cannot be assigned unequivocably to another word class. Some adverbs can qualify a clause or an entire sentence as in *Surprisingly, John left for home*.

**attributive** An adjective which is placed before a noun and specifies a quality as in *His beautiful wife*. Some adjectives can only occur in this role, e.g. German *vorder* in *Ein vorderer Vokal* which cannot occur as a predicative adjective: \**Dieser Vokal ist vorder*.

**clause** A syntactical unit which is smaller than a sentence. There are basically two types, main clauses and subordinate clauses, which are joined by certain grammatical words such as conjunctions or subordinators.

**concord** A feature of human languages where grammatical relationships are expressed by an agreement in form between at least two words, e.g. *We are talking* where the plural pronoun requires the form *are* and that in turn demands the progressive form of the verb. Concord is also a key feature of synthetic languages which have very strict agreement requirements for classes of inflections.

**conjugation** A term from inflectional morphology which refers to changes in ending for verbs depending on such factors as tense, mood, person and number. A set of verbal inflections is also termed an inflectional *paradigm*. The term is sometimes used to refer to the class of verbs which shares sets of forms, e.g. the weak conjugation would refer to all verbs in English (or German) which form their past tense by suffixation of an alveolar stop and not by an alteration of the root vowel.

**constituent** Any unit which is part of a larger one. This can be a recognisable part of a word as with lexical compounds or it can be a phrase in a sentence as indicated in tree representations in phrase structure grammar.

**copula** A particular verb — *be* in English, *sein* in German — which links elements in a sentence, usually in assigning attributes or qualities to nouns, e.g. *Patrick is a miserable linguist*.

**declarative** A type of sentence which makes a positive statement rather than negating a statement or asking a question. Taken as the basic type of sentence.

**deep structure** A level in grammar — specifically syntax — in which ambiguities in structure do not exist and in which the semantic interpretation of a sentence is clear. Contrast surface structure.

**dependent** Any linguistic element which requires the presence of another in a structure or whose form is determined by another element or a grammatical category, for instance the form of the definite article in German which depends on the gender, number and case of the noun it co-occurs with.

**determiner** A linguistic item, such as an article, a pronoun or a numeral, which co-occurs with a noun and in some way qualifies — or determines — the noun. This is a cover term for articles, demonstrative and possessive pronouns.

**direct object** An item in a sentence which indicates the object or being which is immediately affected by the action of the verb, e.g. *He bought the book*; *She kissed the boy*.

**embedding** The insertion of one syntactic phrase or unit within another, e.g. *The girl who stood up is my sister*.

**empty word** A word which does not carry any meaning of its own but which frequently plays a role in indicating a grammatical category or expressing a syntactic relationship, e.g. *it* in *It's Patrick's turn to sing a song*. It contrasts explicitly with a content word.

**gender** A feature of many synthetic languages such as German and Latin which group words — nouns and their determiners (articles, pronouns, adjectives) — according to different formal classes. In the Indo-European context these have the traditional names masculine, feminine, neuter, ultimately because of the connection with the sex of humans and animals — though this is not decisive for the gender system.

**generative linguistics** The main school of linguistics today which assumes that speakers' knowledge of language is largely unconscious and essentially rule-governed. The models used by these linguists are intended to generate, i.e. properly describe, how deep structures are mapped onto actual sentences.

**government** In general any linguistic situation in which one form demands another, for instance in German the adverb *ungeachtet* governs the genitive case.

**grammar** A level of linguistics which is concerned with the manner in which words combine together structurally to form sentences. In this sense grammar is a descriptive phenomenon. It can also be used to refer to speakers' knowledge of how to produce well-formed sentences in which case it is an ability, it is speakers' competence in the generative sense.

**grammatical** A term which refers to whether a sentence, phrase or form is judged by native speakers to be well-formed in their language. Note carefully that *grammatical* and *correct* are two different terms. The latter refers to whether structures or words are deemed right in some externally imposed and putatively absolute sense. A structure or word is deemed grammatical if the majority of speakers accept it and use it in this form. Many so-called 'correct' forms are not in fact used by speakers, e.g. the inflected form *whom* as an accusative relative pronoun which has long since been abandoned in spoken English.

**indicative** A factual mood which is used to make statements rather than issue commands (imperative) or make uncertain, hypothetical statements (subjunctive).

**indirect object** An item in a sentence which accompanies the direct object and which frequently denotes the person affected by an action and as such is always animate. This is a semantic definition. Formally the indirect object may be an accusative as in German *Sie lehrte ihn eine neue Sprache*. In English there is only one pronominal form for both direct and indirect object, the latter being indicated by its position before the former or by a directional preposition like *to*: *She wrote a letter to her cousin*; *She gave him the book*.

**mood** A division in the verbal area which refers to whether the action of the verb represents a fact, a wish, a possibility, necessity or a command.

**negation** In a very general sense the process of denying something. There are many means of saying that something is not the case and most languages reflect this fact in their modes of expression for negation. The Indo-European languages have negation particles beginning in /n-/ which are normally positioned adjacent to the verb to negate it, *Er kam nicht; He didn't come*. In addition there are usually means of negating an entire sentence *Not all the students took their exams in June*. Furthermore, languages have means of augmenting negation, by special adverbs or by doubling the negation particles: *He definitely won't stay; He don't do no work for no-one* (non-standard).

**nominative** A case which indicates the subject of a sentence and the obligatory complement of a verb. It is usually taken to be neutral or basic and is used for the citation form of a noun.

**noun phrase** Any part of a sentence which has a noun as its head. It can range from a single noun to a complex phrase. In behaviour and distribution it is similar to a noun.

**oblique case** A term referring to all cases except the nominative.

**open** A term in grammar which denotes a class which does not have a pre-determined number of members.

**parataxis** Two or more clauses which are linked by using conjunctions, i.e. the clauses have equal status, e.g. *He came home and went to bed immediately*.

**part of speech** Any set of words which form a grammatical group, i.e. which can indicate the same categories or relations, e.g. nouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions.

**participle** A non-finite form of the verb which in most Indo-European languages is used to express participation in an action, e.g. with the present participle as in *He is writing a new book*, or to show that an action has been completed, e.g. with the past participle as in *He has written a new book*. Participles can also appear in attributive form as adjectives, e.g. *A crying baby*, *A written message*.

**passive** A mood, present in Indo-European languages, and which serves to avoid indicating the subject of a verb and which highlights the object, e.g. *The book was stolen* (*by a young student*). Passive sentences are taken to be semantically identical with active ones and are derived from the latter by transformation in generative grammar.

**past tense** A tense which points backwards in time, i.e. which refers to the past viewed from the time at which an utterance is spoken. There may be varying time depths which receive expression in a language, such as the pluperfect in English which indicates that one action took place before another as in *She had eaten before he arrived*.

**perfect** The simple past tense which does not refer to great time depth (*see* Pluperfect) and which may in English express relevance of the action to the present, e.g. *I have spoken to the boss* (present perfect).

**phrase** Any group of words which are taken to be less than a sentence, e.g. by lacking a finite verb, but which are regarded as forming a unit grammatically.

**phrase-structure grammar** A type of primitive generative grammar which offers an analysis of sentences by showing the structure which lies behind them, usually with the help of tree diagrams.

**pluperfect** A form of verbs found in many Indo-European languages and which expresses an action which is in the remote past; those languages which possess such a tense also have a simple tense which is understood to refer to a time closer to the present.

**predicative** A reference to an adjective which occurs after a form of the copula *be* instead of before the noun it qualifies. Some adjectives can only occur in this position, e.g. *The girl is awake* but \**The awake girl* is ungrammatical.

**preposition** A grammatical word which occurs in conjunction with a noun or phrase and which expresses the relation it has to other elements in a sentence. In an analytic language like English prepositions play a central role in the grammar.

**prepositional phrase** A part of a sentence which consists of a noun phrase preceded by a preposition and which functions in its entirety as a complement to a verb, e.g. *She cut the cake with a knife*.

**principles and parameters model** [linguistic theory] A model of generative linguistics which assumes that everyone is born with an unconscious knowledge of what constitutes a basic language, i.e. what essential *principles* it embodies. The term *parameters* alludes to those sections of language structure which receive special values (within a given spectrum) from the particular language acquired by speakers in early childhood.

**reflexive** A type of structure where both subject and object have the same referent, e.g. *He injured himself*.

**relative pronoun** A linguistic item which is used to introduce a relative clause, e.g. *that* in English and *dass* in German.

**sentence** The basic unit of syntax. A structural unit which contains at least a subject and a verb possibly with other complements and which may occur with subordinate elements (in relative clauses) or which may be concatenated with other sentences.

**simple** 1) A reference to a sentence which consists of only one clause. 2) A form of a verb which does not involve the use of an auxiliary.

**slot** Any point in a syntagm — a linear structure such as a phrase or sentence — which can be occupied by a class of items such as a noun or verb.

**subject** The consituent of a clause which is the primary complement of the verb and about which something is said, e.g. *speaker* in the sentence *The speaker was nervous*.

**subordination** A general reference to a relationship of dependence between two elements, units or phrases, for instance, a subordinate clause is one which is dependent on a main clause which it usually follows *He said that she was tired*.

**surface structure** The form in which a sentence actually appears in speech; contrast this with *deep structure*.

**syntagm** Any set of elements which can be strung together as a linear sequence, i.e. as a syntactic unit (phrase or sentence).

**syntax** The investigation of the possible combinations of words in a language. The basic unit of syntax is the sentence which minimally consists of a verb and a subject and maximally of a string of clauses, possibly in a specific relationship to each other. As it is concerned with whole words, syntax is above morphology which examines the internal structure of words. Like other levels of language, syntax is governed by rules of well-formedness which specify which combinations are permissible and which not. It is the task of a syntactic theory (of which there are many) to determine these rules.

**tense** 1) A reference to the point in time at which an action takes place from the stance of the speaker. Three common tenses which are frequently formally marked on verbs are past, future and present with the latter normally being the unmarked case. Languages may also have further divisions such as a remote past or a distant future and may use additional verbal elements, such as modals, to indicate these secondary tenses.

**TMA** (*tense/mood/aspect*) The three axes along which verbs can make distinctions. Not all of these are equally well represented in a given language. For instance the tense system is well catered for in the Romance languages but Germanic languages only have a past and present tense with the future formed with the help of modals.

**tree diagram** A method of representing the structure of a sentence — or occasionally a compound — so that the internal hierarchical organisation is evident. Such structures can be equally well represented using bracketing but this is not as effective visually.

**transformation** [applications] In early versions of generative grammar this was a type of operation which showed a formal link between two types of sentence with more or less identical meaning, e.g. between active or passive sentences. A second usage was in the process of derivation, i.e. when moving from deep to surface structure. Here many linguists assumed that various transformations were necessary. The number of these has been greatly reduced so that present-day generative grammar believes that only one transformation is required, given the general form 'move alpha'.

**word order** The arrangement of words in a linear sequence in a sentence. There is normally an unmarked, a so-called 'canonical', word order in a language — such as SVO in English, VSO in Irish, SOV in Turkish — but usually alternative word orders exist, particularly to allow for emphasis in a sentence such as the fronting of sentence elements for the purpose of topicalisation.

[](https://www.uni-due.de/ELE/LinguisticGlossary.html#GlossTop)

**Semantics and pragmatics**

*Semantics* is the study of meaning in language.

**connotation** Additional meaning which arises due to the associations a word has.

**denotation** The relationship between a word and the non-linguistic, 'outside' world. For instance one could say that the denotation of *cup* is a small vessel-like object for holding beverages.

**gradable** A reference to certain adjectives which can show a degree of a quality rather than presence or absence, for instance small is gradable as one can say 'quite small', 'fairly small'. This term contrasts explicitly with non-gradable.

**homograph** Any two (or more) words which are written the same, though the pronunciation may be different, e.g. *lead*, a verb, and *lead*, a noun.

**homonym** Any set of words which share their form but have different meanings, e.g. *bar* 'legal profession' and *bar* 'public house'. The formal similarity is an accident of phonological development and the forms do not share a common historical root, contrast this situation with that of *polysemy*.

**idiom** A set of words which always co-occur and where the meaning is not necessarily derived by concatenating the individual parts of the idiom, e.g *to take coals to Newcastle* 'to do something entirely superfluous'.

**indirect speech act** Any utterance where there is a discrepancy between literal and intended meaning, e.g. *It's cold in here* said in a room with the window open in winter where the intention of the speech act would be to have the window closed.

**lexical meaning** The meaning of a word which is specifiable independently of other words — ultimately with reference to the non-linguistic world — and which is independent of the grammar of the language.

**meaning, grammatical** A type of meaning which is determined by the grammatical context in which a form occurs. Typical elements with grammatical meaning are prepositions, articles or conjunctions.

**meaning, lexical** A type of meaning which is specifiable independently of other words or of grammatical context. The lexical meaning of *table* is 'a piece of furniture with a horizontal surface designed to be sat at'.

**meaning, sentence** A further type of meaning in which the sentence structure together with lexical and grammatical meaning determines what is meant. For instance the sentence role of a noun as subject or object is significant in determining the meaning of an entire sentence.

**meaning, utterance** A kind of meaning which refers to the context in which a sentence is spoken and where the latter determines what is actually meant, for instance the sentence *It's draughty in here* can be taken to have utterance meaning as a request to close a window or door; see *indirect speech act*.

**pragmatics** The study of language in use in interpersonal communication. Apart from the purely linguistic approach there is a philosophical type of pragmatics, as developed in the late 19th century by American philosophers such as William James and Charles Peirce.

**presupposition** Any information which is taken for granted in a discourse situation, for instance the sentence *Did you enjoy your breakfast?* assumes that the interlocutor already had breakfast.

**proposition** A statement which can be assessed as being true or false, e.g. *The sun is shining* contains the proposition that 'the celestial body at the centre of the solar system is casting its light directly on the surface of the earth' and in any given situation this statement is either true or false.

**quantifier** Any term which serves to indicate an amount such as *all*, *some*, *a few*, or the set of numerals in a language.

**semantic field** A collective term for sets of meanings which are taken to belong together, e.g. colour, furniture, food, clothes. Most of the vocabulary of any language is organised into such fields, i.e. there are few if any words which are semantically isolated.

**semantics** The study of meaning in language. This is an independent level and has several subtypes, such as word, grammatical, sentence and utterance meaning.

**sense relations** The semantic relationships which obtain between words as opposed to those which hold between words and the outside world.

**signifiant** A linguistic item which signifies something; contrasts with *signifié* which is what is signified. The term derives from Ferdinand de Saussure.

**speech act** The act of speaking with another individual. This has become a discipline in its own right since the pioneering work of Austin in the early 1960's. It was put on a firm linguistic footing by Searle at the end of the decade and has since become part of the standard repertoire of all linguists.

**synonym** A word which is taken to have the same meaning as one or more other words. The collocations in which words occur may — indeed usually do — differ as seen with *cranium* and *skull* which are distinguished according to register: the former is a medical term, the latter an everyday one.

**theme** That part of a sentence which is the focus of interest and usually introduced at the beginning.

**rheme** A term applied to the new information conveyed in a sentence.

**unmarked** A reference to any linguistic form which is the most general and least specific of its kind. For instance the present tense is unmarked vis à vis the subjunctive, the nominative vis à vis the genitive, the singular vis à vis the plural, a positive form (*clean*) vis à vis a negative one (*unclean*), unround front vowels vis à vis rounded front vowels, etc. Forms which are unmarked in this conceptual sense tend indeed to be formally less marked, i.e. the plural usually involves the addition of an ending, the genitive has more phonetic substance than the nominative, etc.

**utterance** Any stretch of spoken speech, a sentence or phrase with emphasis on the characteristics of the spoken medium in contrast either with the written form or with more abstract forms of a linguistic analysis.

[](https://www.uni-due.de/ELE/LinguisticGlossary.html#GlossTop)

**Sociolinguistics**

*Sociolinguistics* is the study of how language is used in society.

**accent** 1) Strictly speaking this refers to the pronunciation of a dialect, i.e. it is a reference to the collection of phonetic features which allow a speaker to be identified regionally or socially. It is frequently used to indicate that a given speaker does not speak the standard form of a language. The term is used in German to refer to grammatical features as well. 2) The stress placed on a syllable of a word or the type of stress used by a language (pressure or pitch).

**bilingualism** The ability to speak two languages with native-like competence. In every individual case one language will be dominant. Lay people often use the term if someone can simply speak a second language well.

**code switching** Moving from one language to another within a single sentence or phrase. This is a phenomenon found among bilinguals who feel it is appropriate to change languages (or dialects in some cases) — perhaps to say something which can only be said in the language switched to. Code-switching is governed by fairly strict rules concerning the points in a sentence at which one can change over.

**correctness** An extra-linguistic notion, usually deriving from institutions in society like a language academy or a major publishing house, which attempts to lay down rigid rules for language use, especially in written form. Notions of correctness show a high degree of arbitrariness and are based on somewhat conservative usage, intended to maintain an unchanging standard in a language — a complete fiction.

**creole** A term used to describe a pidgin after it has become the mother tongue of a certain population. This development usually implies that the pidgin has become more complex grammatically and has increased its vocabulary in order to deal with the entire set of situations in which a native language is used. A well-known example is Tok Pisin, a creole spoken in Papua New Guinea and which has official status there.

**dialect** A traditional term referring to a variety of a language spoken in a certain place. There are urban and rural dialects. The boundaries between dialects are always gradual. The term *dialect* is used to denote a geographically distinct variety of a language. Two major points in this connection should be noted: 1) 'dialect' does not refer to the social or temporal aspect of language and 2) the term 'dialect' makes no reference to the standard variety of a language. In connection with the latter point it is important to stress that the standard of a language is nothing more than a dialect which achieved special political and social status at some stage in the past and which has been extensively codified orthographically.

**ethnography of communication** The study of cultural differences in acts of communication. This is a comprehensive term which goes beyond simple differences in language to cover additional aspects such as formulaic use of language (e.g. in greeting or parting rituals), proxemics (the use of distance between partners in a conversation) and kinesics (the study of body movements used in communication).

**honorific** A specific use of language to express deference in a social context. This can encompass special pronominal forms (T- and V-forms in continental European languages) and fixed titular phrases (Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc. in English) or special adjectives (*honourable*, *reverend*, *esquire*).

**hypercorrection** A kind of linguistic situation in which a speaker overgeneralises a phenomenon which he/she does not have in his/her native variety. For example if a speaker from northern England pronounces *butcher* /butʃə/ with the vowel in *but*, i.e. as /bʌtʃə/, then this is almost certainly hypercorrection as he/she does not have the *but*-sound in his/her own dialect and, in an effort to speak 'correct' English, overdoes it. The same applies to native speakers of Rhenish German when they pronounce *Kirschen* like *Kirchen* when they are talking to speakers of High German.

**idiolect** The language of an individual as opposed to that of a group.

**interference** The transfer of certain phenomena from one language to another where they are not considered grammatical. This may happen on an individual level (during second language learning, for example) or collectively in which case it often leads to language change.

**langue** A term used by Saussure to refer to the collective knowledge of a community of the language spoken by its members.

**linguistic stigma** The condemnation of certain forms in a language by the majority of a social group.

**linguistic taboo** Forbidding the use of certain forms. Taboo words change from generation to generation, e.g. the means of referring to sex and sexual practices, as older taboo words lose their strength and become part of general vocabulary.

**parole** A term deriving from Ferdinand de Saussure and which refers to language as it is spoken, contrast this with *langue*.

**pidgin** A language which arises from the need to communicate between two communities. Historically, and indeed in almost all cases, one of the communities is socially superior to the other. The language of the former provides the base on which the latter then creates the pidgin. A pidgin which has become the mother language of a later generation is termed a creole. Pidgins are of special interest to the linguist as they are languages which have been created from scratch and because they are not subject to the normalising influence of a standard. Classically pidgins arose during trade between European countries and those outside of Europe. The lexicon of a pidgin is usually taken from the lexifier language (the European one in question) and its grammar may derive from native input (such as the languages of West Africa during the slave trade with the Caribbean and America) or may take elements from the lexifier language or may 'invent' its own structures going on an innate blueprint which many linguists assume speakers have from birth. The further development of a pidgin is a creole, although this stage does not have to be reached if there is no necessity to develop a native language.

**register** A style level in a language. When we speak we automatically locate ourselves on a specific stylistic level. This can vary depending on the situation in which we find ourselves. For example when talking to the postman one would most likely use a different register than when one is holding a public address.

**sociolect** A variety of a language which is typical of a certain class. Sociolects are most common in urban areas. In history, sociolects may play a role, e.g. in the formation of the English standard, Received Pronunciation, which derives from a city dialect (that of London in the late Middle Ages) but which has long since become a sociolect (Cockney being the dialect of London nowadays).

**sociolinguistics** The study of the use of language in society. Although some writers on language had recognised the importance of social factors in linguistic behaviour it was not until the 1960's with the seminal work of Labov that the attention of large numbers of linguists was focussed on language use in a social context. In particular the successful explanation of many instances of language change helped to establish sociolinguistics as an independent sub-discipline in linguistics and led to a great impetus for research in this area.

**speech community** Any identifiable and delimitable group of speakers who use a more or less unified type of language.

**standard** A variety of a language which by virtue of historical accident has become the leading form of the language in a certain country. As a result of this, the standard may be expanded due to the increase in function which it experiences due to its position in society. There is nothing inherently superior about a standard although nearly all speakers of a community accept that it has highest prestige.

**variety** A term used to refer to any variant of a language which can be sufficiently delimited from another variant. The grounds for such differentiation may be social, historical, spatial or a combination of these. The necessity for a neutral term such as *variety* arose from the loaded use of the term *dialect*: this was not only used in the sense defined above, but also with the implication that the linguistically most interesting varieties of a language are those spoken by the older rural population. This view is understandable given the origin of dialectology in the 19th century, that is in the heydey of historical linguistics. Nowadays, sociolinguistic attitudes are prevalent and the need for a term which can include the linguistic investigation of urban populations from a social point of view became evident.

**vernacular** The indigenous language or dialect of a community. This is an English term which refers to purely spoken forms of a language.

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**Psycholinguistics**

*Psycholinguistics* is the study of language is relation to our cognition and in particular to the way we acquire our first language.

**acquisition** The process whereby a child takes in linguistic information unconsciously and internalises it, using it later when he/she wishes to speak the language in question — his/her native language. This narrower, linguistic definition restricts acquisition to the period of childhood. Acquisition is unconscious, largely unguided and shows a high degree of completeness compared to second language learning.

**behaviourism** One of the main schools of thought in 20th century psychology which maintains that language acquisition proceeds by imitation. It contrasts with nativism which assumes that knowledge of language is innate, the view behind the generative grammar view of language acquisition.

**critical period** A period in early childhood in which language acquisition is most effective (roughly the first 6 years). If exposure to a language begins considerably later then acquisition rarely results in native-like competence. The watershed for successful natural language acquisition is puberty after which it is nearly always incomplete.

**first language** The language which is acquired initially by a child and which is his/her native language. For bilinguals another language may be acquired more or less simultaneously though a situation in which two languages are absolutely equal does not probably exist.

**innateness hypothesis** In language acquisition studies, the notion that children are born with a predisposition to learn language. It contrasts explicitly with the notion that knowledge of language is gained by experience (a view typical of behaviourism in psychology).

**intuition** A term referring to unconscious knowledge about his/her native language which a speaker has. Intuition is used frequently when speakers are asked to judge the grammaticality of sentences.

**language acquisition** The process by which children acquire knowledge about their native language in their early childhood. Acquisition is distinguished from learning which refers to gaining knowledge of a second language in later life.

**language acquisition device** A postulated pre-disposition for learning language which all humans are born with and which enables any child to learn any language in a remarkably short period of time. According to this view, the LAD consists of the structural features which are common to all languages and specific to none.

**overextension** A phenomenon in first language acquisition where the child uses a narrow term in a very general sense, e.g. calling all males 'papa'.

**psycholinguistics** The study of language with reference to human psychology. The term has come to refer in particular to processes of language acquisition, especially of one's first language.

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**Applied linguistics**

*Applied linguistics* studies the uses to which linguistic insights can be put, especially in second language teaching.

**conversation analysis** The techniques for examining and structuring conversations or any type of social interaction which involves spoken language.

**corpus** Any structured and principled collection of data from a particular language — usually in electronic form, i.e. on disk — which has been compiled for the purpose of subsequent analysis. The number of corpora available has increased greatly since the spread of the personal computer in the 1980's. The most famous corpus for historical forms of English is the *Helsinki Corpus of English*.

**dictionary** A reference work which offers varied information — usually arranged in alphabetical order — about words in a language, such as their spelling, pronunciation, meaning and possibly historical origins, additional shades of meaning, typical combinations (collocations) and status vis à vis the standard of the language concerned.

**discourse analysis** The investigation of the structure and patterning of discourse (human speech). It contrasts explicitly with analyses of written language or of contrived examples in linguistic works.

**error** A characteristic mistake made by learners of a second language, usually traceable to a structural feature of their native language.

**interference** The transfer of certain phenomena from one language to another where they are not considered grammatical. This may happen on an individual level (during second language learning, for example) or collectively in which case it often leads to language change.

**mistake** An instance of incorrect usage in a foreign language which is apparently random; *see* Error.

**second language teaching** This is probably the main area of applied linguistics. There are many views on how a second language is *learned*, above all in comparison with the relative perfection of first language *acquisition*. Research here tends to concentrate on developing models to explain the process and ideally they should be applied to the actually teaching of foreign languages to improve results.

**textlinguistics** The investigation of the structure and style of texts, of pieces of language which consist of more than a single sentence.

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**Language change**

*Language change* is the investigation of the manner in which languages change their structure over time.

**borrowing** The act of adopting some aspect of one language into another. It may be lexical (the most obvious and common type of borrowing) but also syntactic, morphological or phonological. The latter types of borrowing require that some section of the population be in direct contact with the second language. Lexical borrowing can be due to written influence as with the English loanwords in Modern German yielding so-called 'cultural borrowings'. Borrowing is one of the chief means of expanding the vocabulary of a language.

**comparative method** The method used in comparative philology. The technique involves comparing cognate forms from genetically related languages (such as those of the Indo-European family) with a view to reconstructing the proto-language from which all others can be taken to have derived. Such a method must take regular sound changes and later analogy into account. This allows one to link up forms which are superficially different but which can be traced back to a single form, itself usually non-attested. For instance English *heart*, German *Herz*, Latin *cordia*, Greek *kardios* can be shown to derive regularly from an Indo-European root \**kerd.*

**contact** A term which refers to a situation in which speakers of two languages or varieties are continually in contact with each other, either due to geographical or social closeness or both. The mutual influence which results from such contact can and does lead to changes in the structure — or at least in the lexicon — of one or both languages.

**convergence** In a general sense a process whereby two languages or varieties come to resemble each other more and more. In historical linguistics the term is often used to refer to a situation whereby two causes are taken to have led to a certain effect, e.g. where a feature in a present-day dialect is taken to derive from both substrate interference and language-internal developments.

**drift** An imperceptible change in the typology of a language in a more or less constant direction as with the shift from synthetic to analytic in the course of the history of English.

**etymological fallacy** A common but erroneous opinion, found among lay speakers and historically with many authors before the advent of linguistics as a scientific discipline in the 19th century, that the oldest meaning of a word is the most genuine or correct. Note that the 'oldest meaning' is a fiction in itself as it is usually impossible to trace words back to their initial use, this lying in pre-history.

**etymology** An area within historical linguistics which is concerned with the origin and development of the form and meaning of words and the relationship of both these aspects to each other.

**family tree** A model of language development common in the last century (the term derives from August Schleicher) which sees languages as splitting further in a manner reminiscent of genetic relationships. A major alternative to this was the *wave model* of Johannes Schmidt (1870).

**family** A group of languages that can be shown to stem from a single proto-language by a process of splitting at various points in the latter's history.

**genetic classification** The arrangement of languages into groups on the basis of their historically recognisable relationships and not going on any similarity in structure.

**grammaticalisation** This is an historical process in language which refers to a change in status from lexical to grammatical for certain elements, frequently due to semantic bleaching (loss of lexical meaning). For instance the (archaic) adverb/adjective *whilom* 'formerly, erstwhile' derives from a dative plural of the Old English word *hw*ī*lom* 'at times' which was with time not felt to be an inflected noun but a different word class, an adverb or adjective.

**historical linguistics** The study of how languages develop over time as opposed to viewing them at a single point in time. The major direction in linguistics up until the advent of structuralism at the beginning of the 20th century.

**internal reconstruction** One of the two major procedures of historical linguistics in which evidence from the internal development of a language is used in reconstructing earlier stages of the language. It contrasts explicitly with the comparative method which relies on evidence from related languages.

**language change** A process by which developments in a language are introduced and established. Language change is continual in every language and it is largely regular. However, the rate of language change is different among different languages. It depends on a number of factors, not least on the amount of contact and informational exchange with other linguistic communities on the one hand (this tends to further change) and the degree of standardisation and universal education in the speech community on the other hand (this tends to hamper change).

**language contact** A situation in which speakers of two languages intermingle. The causes of this range from invasion and deportation to voluntary emigration to a new country. The results of this intermingling depend on external factors such as the relative status of the two linguistic groups and on internal factors such as the typological similarity of the languages involved, i.e. whether their grammatical structures are comparable or not.

**language death** The process by which a language ceases to exist. It is characterised by the switch over to some other language which surrounds the dying language and which is a superstratum to it, e.g. English vis à vis Manx on the Isle of Man in the middle of the present century.

**law** A formulation of an ordered or predictable relationship between forms. Such laws can be diachronic or synchronic. An example of the former is Grimm's Law which states (simply) that Indo-European voiceless stops changed to corresponding fricatives at the beginning of Germanic. A synchronic law would be the devoicing of obstruents at the end of words (and syllables) in German. A law is taken to be virtually without exception.

**lexical diffusion** A type of language change in which a certain feature spreads slowly rather than establishing itself at once. Cases of lexical diffusion are characterised by incompleteness, otherwise it is not recognisable afterwards and is a case of normal change which affects the entire vocabulary. The lexical diffusion type of change usually ceases before it can cover all theoretical instances in a language, e.g. the lowering of short /u/ in the Early Modern English period which does not apply to instances before [ʃ] and after a labial stop: *bush*, *push*.

**metonymy** A type of semantic change in which a single aspect of a meaning or an attribute is used for the entire phenomenon, e.g. *Whitehall* for the English parliament, *Paris* for the French government, *The White House* for the American administration.

**Neogrammarian hypothesis** A view of language change which assumes that it proceeds gradually on a phonetic level but affects all words with the sounds undergoing the change simultaneously. This view was propounded in the 19th century by German linguists starting from Leipzig. It contrasts with the more recent view that change can proceed word by word through the lexicon (*see* Lexical Diffusion).

**palatalisation** A common historical process whereby sounds produced at the velum are progressively shifted forward towards the palate. This is usually a change in manner of articulation from stop to affricate and possibly to fricative. Cf. /k/ > /c/ > /tæ/ > /tʃ/ (> /ʃ/) as can be seen in the development of Latin *camera* to Modern French *chambre*.

**reconstruction** A technique for determining earlier forms of a language. This is achieved by analysing and comparing early attestations (first texts) in one or more languages.

**substrate** A language which is socially less prestigious than another spoken in the same area but which can nonetheless be the source for grammatical or phonological features in the more prestigious language. Substratum influence is often quoted as being instrumental in the formation of pidgins and creoles and as being responsible for many instances of historical change.

**superstrate** A variety of a language which enjoys a position of power and/or prestige compared to another. It may be a standard form of a language or a different language from that found natively in a specific country or region.

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**Language typology**

*Language typology* is the study of the synchronic structure of languages for the purpose of classifying them according to recurring patterns and regularities.

**analytic** A term used for a language which tends to use free morphemes to indicate grammatical categories. Examples are Modern English and French to a certain extent. Other languages, such as Chinese or Vietnamese, are very clearly analytic and approach a relationship of one word per morpheme.

**cross-linguistic** Refers to phenomena which occur in several different languages or in investigations which draw on data from diverse languages.

**isolating language** A language type where individual words do not vary in form and where grammatical categories and relations are indicated by separate words and/or by word-order. English is fairly isolating; Chinese much more so.

**linguistic area** A part of the world in which several genetically unrelated languages are spoken but which nonetheless show structural similarities. Such areas usually form an approximate geographical unit, e.g. the Balkans, the Caucasus, perhaps the eastern Baltic Sea region. The term is a translation of German *Sprachbund*, lit. 'language federation'.

**linguistic universals** A postulated set of linguistic features which are common to all languages and which ultimately derive from our psychological make-up and our perception of the world, e.g. the existence of subject, predicate, object or first, second and third pronouns in all languages.

**polysynthetic** A reference to a language which has large complex words in which several grammatical categories are fused together. *See* Incorporating.

**synthetic** A language which is characterised by an extensive inflectional morphology, e.g. Latin and Modern German. This type contrasts with analytic and can be taken to have developed historically from the latter through centuries of change during which words fused together to give compound forms. For this reason new languages, like pidgins and creoles, are never synthetic in type.

**typology** The description of the grammatical structure of language independently of genetic relationships. There are many commonalities between languages which result from morphological principles so that this view of language structure is just as valid as an historical consideration. Furthermore, languages which occupy a geographically delimited area, for instance the Balkans, may come to share structural properties, irrespective of historical background or genetic affiliation.

**typological classification** The ordering of language on the basis of shared grammatical structure rather than on historical or genetic grounds.

**universal** Any feature or property which holds for all languages. These are few and far between though near-universals, i.e. those which are good for the vast majority of languages, are more common and often more interesting in the insights which they lead to concerning the nature of human language in general.