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Preface

My intention in writing this book to provide a basic introduction to modern linguistics that conveys an idea of the scope of the subject, and a feeling for the excitement of doing linguistics – the excitement of finding out about language and languages, including your own. I hope it will stimulate an **understanding** of the subject, rather than rote memorization of facts. I would also like to convey some appreciation of the reasons why linguists do what they do, and for the approaches and methods they adopt in studying languages. The third thing I would like to encourage is the development of your powers of observation, as well as your critical and creative faculties.

There are many excellent introductory textbooks on linguistics. Why another? My motivation lies mainly in dissatisfaction with particular aspects of the existing textbooks. None offers precisely what I desire in terms of manner of presentation, pedagogic philosophy, the range and type of information presented and theoretical stance. As a result of teaching an introductory course in linguistics in 2002, I was convinced of the need to write my own textbook to remedy these dissatisfactions.

Organization and presentation

Manner of presentation

This book employs a clear physical layout of information, presenting the material in brief, clear sentences and sections. Each chapter begins with a short abstract, a detailed table of contents, a list of the main goals of the chapter and a checklist of the major terms and concepts introduced. It concludes with a summary, a guide to further reading and a list of problems and issues for further thought.

The book is accompanied by a website containing additional information and a set of multiple-choice questions designed to test your understanding of the main points of each chapter. Address: <http://www.continuumbooks.com/linguistics/mcgregor>. Where particularly relevant, you will be directed to this website by the icon in the left or right margin.



This manner of organization should permit the book to be used not just as a textbook for a course in linguistics, but also by an independent reader wanting to find out about linguistics.

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Pedagogic philosophy

My two major concerns are first to encourage and facilitate understanding linguistic concepts and how to use them, and secondly to promote observation of language. Thus the work aims to present not just ‘facts’ but also ways of dealing with them, ways of understanding them in relation to the broad issues of concern to linguistics. To this end, each chapter includes a set of questions for further thought (some quite challenging) and exercises. I believe that it is through attempting to solve simple – and difficult! – problems that students can learn and understand a subject, more so than by reflecting on larger philosophical issues.

You have to *understand* linguistics to do it. But at the same time, you have to *do it* to understand it: you have to get your hands dirty by engaging with data – grappling with data, attempting to understand it and relating it to what you already know (or think you know) about language or a language. Until you begin doing both of these, it is pointless, in my opinion, to dwell on the philosophical issues surrounding the subject, as fascinating as they may be. A part of what is especially attractive about linguistics is that there is still a lot to learn about every one of the roughly 7000 languages spoken in the world today. Even a student new to the subject can, if they are attentive to speech around them, learn something new (or not widely known) about their own language. This I know, having seen some nice examples from students in past courses.

Not only do doing and understanding go together, but a third component is essential, namely the ‘facts’, the knowledge about language and languages. Notice that I said in the first paragraph of this section that my aim was to present ‘**not just** “facts”’; I didn’t say or suggest that facts are unimportant or uninteresting! To the contrary, the ‘facts’ are extremely interesting, and to ignore them would be suicidal for a linguist, as it would be for any scientist or researcher. Some chapters rely rather more heavily on facts than others.

Another aspect of understanding linguistics to see it in a historical perspective: part of understanding why linguistics is as it is, and why linguists do things the way they do, requires and appreciation of the intellectual traditions of the subject. The introductory chapter contains a section presenting modern linguistics from a broad historical perspective; it also contains an exercise directing students to find out about particular linguists. The website for the book extends on these by presenting a brief overview of the history of the subject.



Range and type of information

Many textbooks focus almost exclusively on one language, English. This book also uses many examples from English, presuming that anyone who can read it will have sufficient knowledge of the language to permit it to be used as a foundation on which an understanding of concepts and arguments can be constructed. However, numerous examples are given from other languages, many ‘exotic’ and/or endangered, including languages I have first-hand experience of myself. Partly this is a statement that other languages are as important as English to linguistics, and indeed are crucial to the subject. These examples are also intended

to encourage you to try to understand and appreciate the ways other languages do things, which can be very different to the way English does things.

Theoretical framework

Modern introductory textbooks tend either to specifically acknowledge no particular theoretical framework, purporting to be either atheoretical or catholic in orientation, or to adopt the dominant theoretical framework in linguistics, that is, generative grammar (see §1.5). Almost no introductory textbook presents linguistics from any of the many alternative perspectives. For these other perspectives one must go to more advanced textbooks on specific topics. This book is intended to fill the lacuna, and present beginning linguistics from an alternative perspective, specifically one in which meaning and use play absolutely central roles. While I have my own minority theoretical perspective, I do not attempt to present or argue it here; rather I stand back from it, and adopt a more general stance that includes many theories within the so-called functionalist and cognitivist domains. Needless to say, not all practitioners in these theories will agree with everything I say.

There are other reasons why I believe it is unhelpful to adopt a too non-partisan approach in an introductory text. It is important for beginning students to get the feel for working and thinking within one approach. This has the advantage of permitting them to go more deeply into a topic and gain some 'hands-on' experience in doing things according to that approach. On the other hand, presentation of theoretical variety – perhaps chaos – tends to leave students bewildered on the one hand, and on the other, frustrated with the sketchy treatment of topics. The typical unfortunate result is that they acquire no usable skills.

Structure of the book

Aside from Chapter 1, *Introduction*, which sets the scene for the book, this book is divided into three parts. Part I, consisting of Chapters 2–6, focuses on the structure and system of human languages. It presents a number of central notions of modern linguistics that are essential to an understanding of the subject, both in the remainder of the book and in subsequent courses in linguistics. These chapters are fairly demanding on understanding, and you are likely to find them fairly heavy going.

It is perfectly normal for beginning students to feel lost in the first few weeks of their introductory linguistics course: it takes time to get the 'feel' of what linguistics is all about, and to appreciate the unfamiliar ways of thinking about language. Things should start to become clearer in the second month; if not, you should consult your lecturer or the tutor.

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Part II, *Language: a human phenomenon*, consists of Chapters 7–10. These chapters look beyond the structure of individual languages, and situate human language and languages in the wider contexts of human life and culture, including other forms of communication and other languages. The remaining three chapters, Chapters 11–13, make up Part III, *Language: uniformity and diversity*. These chapters focus on variation in languages: with the cross-linguistic range of variation in language structures, language change over time and the linguistic diversity of the world. You should find Parts II and III easier going conceptually, though perhaps more taxing on memory.

The Parts II and III are relatively independent, and may be read or taught in either order. Both, however, presume knowledge and understanding of some of the basic notions presented in Part I. In particular, notions of the phoneme and morpheme, are presumed in a number of places. With a little additional introductory material, or explanation of concepts as encountered, it would be possible to present Part II prior to Part I; Part III, however, demands more of the notions developed in Part I, and would be unsatisfactory prior to Part I. I teach, and have placed, Part II after Part I largely for purposes of variety, and as respite from the rather heavy-going Part I.

Guide for the student

This book contains far too much material to be covered in a standard one-semester introductory course on linguistics. Your lecturer will be selective in the range of chapters covered and the material from each chapter that is used. Nevertheless, my advice is to read the entire book, including the chapters not covered in your course, and the material on the accompanying website. You should of course focus more on the chapters covered in your course – but do read the others. They provide valuable additional information and perspectives on the subject.

I advise students to read and attempt to understand each chapter before the lecture on that topic. But don't get too bogged down on details. If you don't understand something after making an honest attempt at it, move on, keep reading. The lectures will present the fundamental ideas of each chapter in a different medium, orally, providing you with another chance to understand the topic.

Your lecturer or tutor can also be consulted on points you have difficulty with. But you should first make a serious attempt to understand and attempt to formulate precise questions. Your lecturer or tutor will be able to answer a specific question, though they will be hard-pushed to help you if you can't formulate a question. It is very hard to help if you can only say you don't understand! I always advise my students to formulate at least one question about each chapter to ask me or the tutor prior to the lecture or tutorial.

Here is my advice on how to attack each chapter. Begin by examining the preliminary materials, which give an idea of the scope, contents, goals and organization of ideas in the

chapter; the list of key terms highlights concepts to take particular notice of as you read the body of the chapter. With this background, read the chapter through. I would recommend first reading it rapidly, and then to go back and read it more carefully, focusing in particular on the places where you had difficulties in understanding.

After you finish reading a chapter, go back over the list of key terms, and check that they now make sense to you. If they don't, review that part of the text, and refresh your memory and understanding.

I also advise doing this after the lecture as well: that is, review what you have read. At this point, that is, after the lecture, try to summarize the chapter in a few sentences, in your own words. Compare your summary with the summary included at the end of the chapter.

Can you answer the basic question: what is the chapter about?

Each chapter, as mentioned above, contains a number of exercises and questions for further thought. There are too many for you to complete each week. You will need to be selective – read each question through, and select the ones that you find most interesting and attempt them first. (Don't just start at the first, and go until you run out of steam or time.) Answers are not provided for these questions – it is just too tempting to look at an answer before thinking a problem through.

One of the skills that you need to learn at university is how to be selective in what you do and think carefully about, and how to make good choices in your selections. This is a skill that you should attempt to develop over time: don't expect it to come immediately and naturally to you. One of the ways you can develop the skill is by comparing your summary of the chapter with the summary in the book. Have you focused on a minor issue? Have you identified all of the major points identified in the chapter summary?

A set of multiple-choice questions can be found on the website for the book. The idea of these is to test your understanding of the main ideas of each chapter. You should also attempt these each week to keep track of your progress. Feedback is provided at the completion of the test, when you submit your responses. Your overall performance is indicated, and specific comments are provided on each of the questions you got wrong.

What else should you read? Each chapter contains a list of further readings on the topics covered. No one expects you to read all of these things: that would take you much longer than the course. The references are mentioned for your information, for you to follow up if you are especially interested in some topic. (Here again you need to develop your skills in selectivity.)



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This could as well be after the course, perhaps even at a later time in your linguistic studies. Glancing over this section of the chapter may also alert you to some issues not dealt with in the text, or only briefly dealt with.

Sometimes reading another treatment of a topic will assist your understanding of it; but if you have difficulty in understanding something, take the advice given above, rather than attempt to read about it in a dozen different books – as likely as not you will still not understand!

I am certainly not discouraging you from reading. What I do discourage is reading as a replacement to thinking. Reading should be, rather, an enhancement to your thinking. Read as much additional material as you can find the time for, focusing in particular on those issues that most interest you.

I am sometimes asked, ‘What do I need to remember?’ This is a difficult question to answer. As indicated above, I consider understanding the subject more important than rote memorization of facts. Understanding, however, also involves memory, and if you understand a particular point, you will want to remember the general drift of ideas leading up to it, even if you don’t remember every tiny detail. The general patterns are much more important to remember than the details; specific minor details you can find by referring to this or some other book. But think about it! The less you remember, the more you need to rely on finding or re-finding the information. Imagine if every time you added 2 and 3 you had to look up your mathematical tables or work it out from first principles or on your fingers. This would be more than a little impractical when you go shopping.

My advice is that you should remember the main concepts – i.e. both the terms and their meanings – given at the beginning of each chapter. These are notions that are likely to be used in later chapters, lectures and other courses. If you have to look them up every time you encounter them your understanding will be seriously impaired.

Århus, April 2008

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The videos of ASL included on the accompanying website are courtesy of the National Center for Sign Language and Gestures Resources at Boston University (directors Carol Neidle and Stan Sclaroff). Thanks also to the signer, Lana Cook, for permission to use this video, and Carol Neidle for useful assistance and advice. The phonetic font, DoulosSIL is used courtesy SIL International. Credits for graphical materials are given in the captions.

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Abbreviations and Conventions Used in Examples

I have avoided using abbreviations as far as possible, in most cases restricting them to glosses in example sentences, and occasionally for cited forms of morphemes in the text. Just a few of the technical terms used in the text are abbreviated; these are not included in the list below, but can be found in the *Glossary* at the end of the book.

The following is a list of the main abbreviations used in the example sentences. Where possible they follow the recommendations of the *The Leipzig glossing rules: conventions for interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses*, available online at <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>. In a few cases an abbreviation has more than one different interpretations; it should be obvious from context which interpretation is intended.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| ABS | absolutive (case of object and transitive subject) |
| ACC | accusative (object case) |
| ACT | active (case of active participant) |
| AdjP | adjectival phrase |
| AdvP | adverbial phrase |
| APP | applicative ('do with (something)') |
| AUX | auxiliary |
| C | clause; consonant |
| CL | classifier |
| COMP | complementiser (like <i>that</i> in <i>think that X</i>) |
| DAT | dative ('for') |
| DEC | declarative |
| DET | determiner |
| ERG | ergative (case of transitive subject) |
| FUT | future |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| GER | gerund |
| INACT | inactive (case of an inactive participant) |
| IND | indicative |
| INTER | interrogative word |
| IO | indirect object (e.g. recipient) |
| IRR | irrealis ('didn't or mightn't happen') |
| MAS | masculine (gender of nouns referring to things classified like male human beings) |
| N | noun, nominal |
| NEUT | neuter (gender of nouns referring to things) |
| NF | non-finite |
| NOM | nominative (case of transitive and intransitive subjects) |
| NP | noun phrase |
| NPST | non-past (present or future) |
| O | object (grammatical relation) |
| OBJ | object case form |
| P | phrase |
| PART | participial |
| PFV | perfective |
| PL | plural ('many') |
| POSS | possessive |
| PP | prepositional phrase; postpositional phrase |
| PROG | progressive |
| PRF | perfect |
| PRS | present |
| PST | past |
| REL | relative clause marker (e.g. <i>who</i> as in <i>the woman who saw it</i>) |
| RPST | recent/past |
| S | subject (grammatical relation) |

XX Abbreviations and Conventions

| | |
|------------------|--|
| SG | singular ('one') |
| SUB | subject case form |
| SUBJ | subjunctive ('it is hoped or wished that') |
| TR | transitive |
| V | verb; vowel |
| VOL | volitional ('to want to do something') |
| VP | verb phrase |
| 1 | first person ('I', 'we') |
| 2 | second person ('you') |
| 3 | third person ('he', 'she', 'it', 'they') |
| * | ungrammatical or unacceptable sentence in syntax; proto-form in historical linguistics |
| ? | questionable expression |
| - | morpheme boundary |
| → | acting on |
| [] | phonetic representation |
| // | phonemic representation |
| < > | graphemic (written) representation |