How to Use This Book

The purpose of this book is to provide more than enough material for a one-term introduction to the study of language and linguistics for students whose primary educational goal lies outside of the discipline of linguistics. In other words, this is an introduction to linguistics for people who do not plan to be linguists. There are two types of students who fit our target audience: (a) students who plan to pursue a career in the educational field and need to be acquainted with the ways language works so as to be effective teachers; and (b) students who need some background in linguistics because their discipline is adjacent to, but not overlapping with, linguistics. Among these we may list as examples psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. Since this is a large and diverse target audience, we have included a wide variety of topics and teachers will need to choose chapters based on class goals, as we will make clear in the pages that follow. This text is also suitable for practicing ESL/EFL teachers, among others, who need a reference volume about language.

We have assumed a minimum of knowledge, particularly about language. In our experience, high school graduates often do not have a firm grounding in English grammar. For this reason, we have provided Chapter 19, which provides the basics of English grammar. We have also provided a glossary of linguistic terms.

This text does not claim to be an introduction to linguistics, which would require a much more technical discussion of theoretical linguistics; most notably it would make it necessary to cover X-bar syntax and the GB/PP/minimalism developments of Chomsky’s standard theory (as well as other offshoots, such as HPSG, LFG, etc.). Our choice has been to
cover the standard theory (with a few additions, justified pedagogically) since its knowledge is assumed in the field (unlike minimalism, say). This makes it unsuitable, as the sole text, for those students who need more than a passing acquaintance with the methods and findings of linguistics, i.e., those students whose future professional activities will require work with and about language, such as linguistics majors and ESL/EFL teachers in training. However, this is not to say that they wouldn’t benefit from reading this book.

As the title of the book tries to make clear, the text has three foci: language itself, in its systematic organization; language as a tool for interaction among speakers; and language as an object of variation, i.e., how language reflects the differences in its speakers, the situations in which they use it, and the goals to which they put it.

In our choices of subjects, we have been guided by what we saw as practical applications in the classroom and in the world of the knowledge we presented. We have tried to present knowledge that our students will be able to put to use when they leave school.

The organization of the book is cyclical: a subject is first introduced in very general terms in one of the initial chapters and is then taken up again in more detail in one of the later chapters, thus allowing the teacher to select which topics he/she wants to focus on, while retaining the all-important comprehensiveness of the presentation, which tries to provide a representative panorama of linguistics and applied linguistics. The cyclical organization is also a feature for the students: it provides repetition, which facilitates learning.

Throughout, we have conceptualized our audience as current college students, people who are comfortable with hypertext/cybermedia. For that reason, and for reasons of good pedagogy, we have sought to provide as many links inside the text as we can. We begin by providing a general discussion and then apply the terms to a specialized field. We also want the students to see (and hopefully make) connections between old and new material, and we hope that by providing them something like buttons on a Web page, we allow and perhaps even encourage them to remind themselves of the concepts throughout the course. Whether that is called reinforcement, spiraling, or strengthening connections, it remains the clearest path to learning we know. Needless to say, one does not need to be computer literate to read this book!

Other features that students will find helpful are that new and significant terms are bolded in the text, and many are listed at the end of each chapter (under the heading Words to Know). Most in-text bolded words appear
in the more than 600-entry glossary, which provides more examples and definitions for the key words. Other general terms important to studying linguistics are also included in the glossary. Exercises and activities as well as references to the sources used in the text and other sources for further reading complement each chapter. The Further Readings at the end of the chapters use the customary author/year-of-publication system to refer to the comprehensive bibliography at the end of the volume.

Interspersed in the text the reader will find “fun boxes” (such as this one), which are not strictly required reading but contain material that may stimulate discussion or may be of additional interest.

Occasionally a very important definition will be shaded. Those should probably be memorized.

We do not expect that any single course will cover all the chapters in the book (although we would like to hear of such feats!). The abundance of material is intended to give options to the teachers. We would expect a typical course for students without prior background in linguistics to cover Chapters 1–6, which introduce the background material on linguistics and broadly cover sociolinguistics; teachers would then pick chapters according to the course’s goals. For example, a course for English majors may want to cover Chapters 1–6 and then Chapters 7 and 8 on African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), 10 on gender issues, 14 on literary language, 17 on the history of English, and perhaps spend time on Chapters 18 and 19 on grammar. A course for education majors may want to cover Chapters 1–6, 7, and 8 on AAVE; 10 on gender issues; 11 on literacy; 12 and 13 on first and second language acquisition; and 18 and 19 on grammar. A course for non-majors, particularly for social scientists, may want to cover Chapters 1–6, the sections on international English (17.5) and on language planning (Chapter 9), plus some of the chapters on the social use of language (e.g., 8 or 10). A course for the humanities, such as a general-education introduction to language, could work selectively with Chapters 1–3; cover Chapters 4–6; move on to 12; and then read Chapters 7 and 8, 10, 14, 15, and 9 or 17.

The chapters have different lengths, and so one should not plan one-week-per-chapter courses. Probably Chapters 2 and 3 will be the toughest, requiring more than a week of class time, whereas all the other chapters can be covered in a week or less.
Although we tried to write this book as clearly as possible, not all parts are equally as accessible. There are sections that students will find more difficult. Teachers should keep this in mind and direct their students accordingly. The sections on articulatory phonetics (2.2.2), the mathematical foundations of Chomskian syntax (2.4.2), the theories of pidgin and creole origins (7.3), the more technical discussion of AAVE (8.2), and the comparative method in historical linguistics (17.6.1) may be left to the attention of motivated students without hindering too much the progress of the argument.

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