

Introduction to Linguistics

Unit 1



Moisés A. Bittner
Phonetics and Phonology
Autumn Term

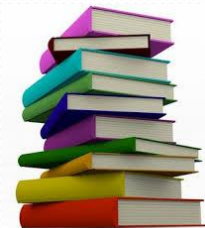
Definition of Linguistics

- **Linguistics** can be defined as the *scientific* or *systematic* study of language. It is a **science** in the sense that it scientifically studies the rules, systems and principles of **human languages**.



Linguistics is guided by three canons of science

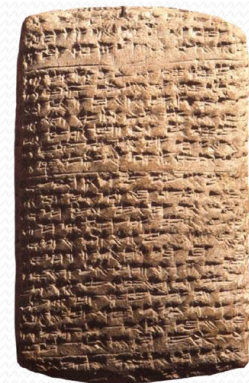
- 1) **Exhaustiveness:** it strives for *thoroughness* in the examination of *relevant materials*.
- 2) **Consistency:** there should be *no contradiction* between different parts of the total statement.
- 3) **Economy:** other things being equal, a *shorter statement or analysis* is to be preferred to one that is longer or more complex.



Linguistics has two main purposes

- It studies the **nature of language** and tries to *establish a theory of language* and *describes languages* in the light of the theory established.
- It examines all the forms of language in general and seeks a scientific understanding of the ways in which it is organised to fulfil the needs it serves and *the functions it performs in human life*.

One of the Amarna letters, first discovered in 1887, and written mostly in Akkadian cuneiform, the writing system of ancient Mesopotamia.



Linguistics vs. Traditional Grammar: (Descriptivism vs. Prescriptivism)



- First, **linguistics** *describes languages* and does not lay down rules of correctness. Linguists are interested in what is said, not what they think ought to be said. So they are often said to be descriptive, not prescriptive.
- A second important way in which **linguistics** differs from traditional grammar is that *linguists regard the spoken language as primary*, not the written. It is believed that speech came into being first for any human language and the writing system came along much later.
- Thirdly, traditional grammar is based on Greek and Latin and it tries to *impose their categories and structures on other languages*, while **linguistics** describes each language on its own merits.

Use of studying Linguistics

- For a student of language
- For a teacher of foreign languages
- For a researcher



For a student of language

- To know the general properties of language can help the student to have *an overview of human language* which in turn will stop him/her from asking unnecessary questions.



For a teacher of foreign languages

- S/He will definitely benefit a great deal from *the knowledge of linguistics*.
- S/He will learn about not only how language is pronounced or structured, but also *how it should be presented to learners*.
- S/He will know not only how each level of the language system is related to other levels, but also how language is closely related to many things outside itself, such as *the mind, the brain, and society*, among other things.



For a researcher



- There is even more scope for displaying his/her abilities. First, there are *various branches of linguistics*, each of which is equally fascinating and challenging.
- Secondly, *linguistic research is going deeper and deeper*, often from mere descriptions to logical and philosophical explanations.
- Thirdly, linguistics is becoming more and more *interdisciplinary*, which means that it draws on the findings of other disciplines while it also sheds light on their research.

Diachronic Linguistics vs. Synchronic Linguistics

(*dia-*, through, across; *chronos*: time)

(*syn-*, with, together; *chronos*: time)

- **Diachronic** or Diachronous, from the Greek word Διαχρονικός (Diahronikós), is a term for **something happening over time**. A diachronic study or analysis concerns itself with *the evolution and change over time* of that which is studied; it is roughly equivalent to *historical*. Thus diachronic linguistics is also known as historical linguistics.
- A **synchronic** study or analysis, in contrast, limits its concern to *a particular moment of time*. Thus synchronic linguistics takes a language as a working system **at a particular point in time** without concern for how it has developed to its present state.

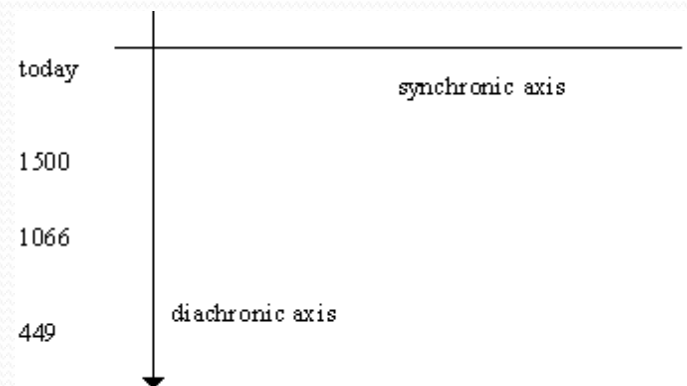
diachrony (historical viewpoint)

—————> time axis

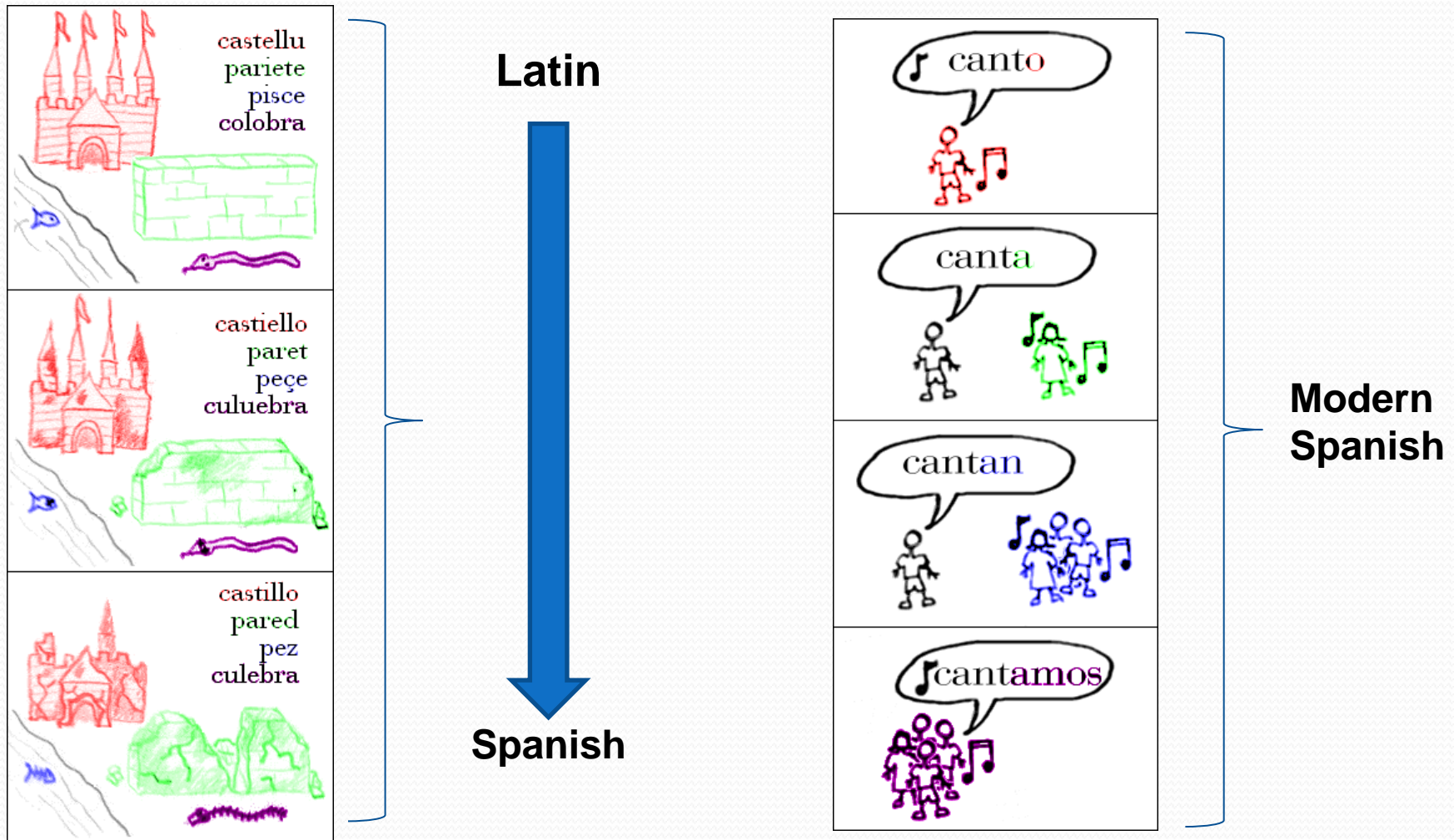
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synchronic 'slices' (points in time)

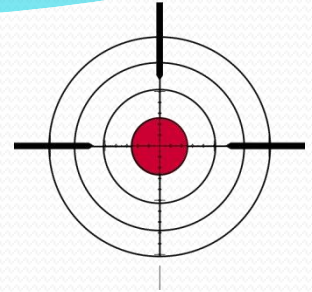
(often the present as in *A synchronic study of the English verb*)



Diachronic Analysis vs. Synchronic Analysis



Scope of Linguistics



- **Microlinguistics** includes: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics.
- **Macrolinguistics** includes: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, stylistics, discourse analysis, computational linguistics, cognitive linguistics, applied linguistics.

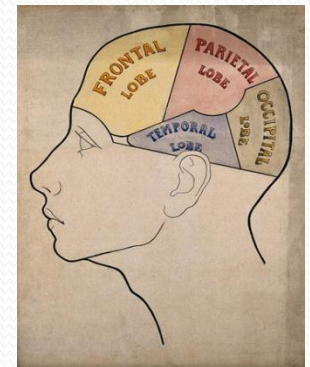
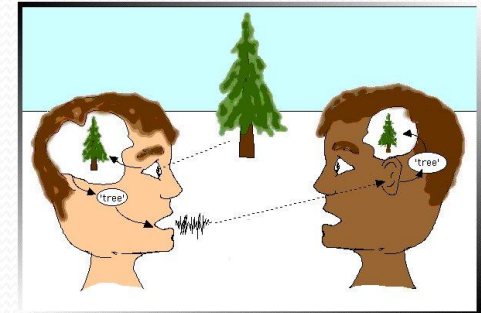
Microlinguistics

- **Phonetics** is the **scientific study of speech sounds**. It studies how speech sounds are articulated, transmitted, and received in all living languages.
- **Phonology** is the study of how **speech sounds function** in a specific language, it studies *the ways speech sounds are organised*. It can be seen as the functional phonetics of a particular language.
- **Morphology** is the study of the formation of words. It is a branch of linguistics which breaks words into **morphemes**. It can be considered as the grammar of words as syntax is the grammar of sentences.

- **Syntax** deals with the combination of words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. It is the grammar of sentence construction.
- **Semantics** is a branch of linguistics which is concerned with the study of meaning in all its formal aspects. Words have several types of meaning.
- **Pragmatics** can be defined as the study of language in use. It deals with how speakers use language in ways which cannot be predicted from linguistic knowledge alone, and how hearers arrive at the intended meaning of speakers.

Macrolinguistics

- **Sociolinguistics** studies the relations between language and society: how social factors influence the structure and use of language.
- **Psycholinguistics** is the study of language and mind: the mental structures and processes which are involved in the *acquisition, comprehension, and production* of language. (storage and access of words in the mental dictionary; language processing mechanism, etc.)
- **Neurolinguistics** is the study of language processing and language representation in the brain. It typically studies the disturbances of language comprehension and production caused by the damage of certain areas of the brain.



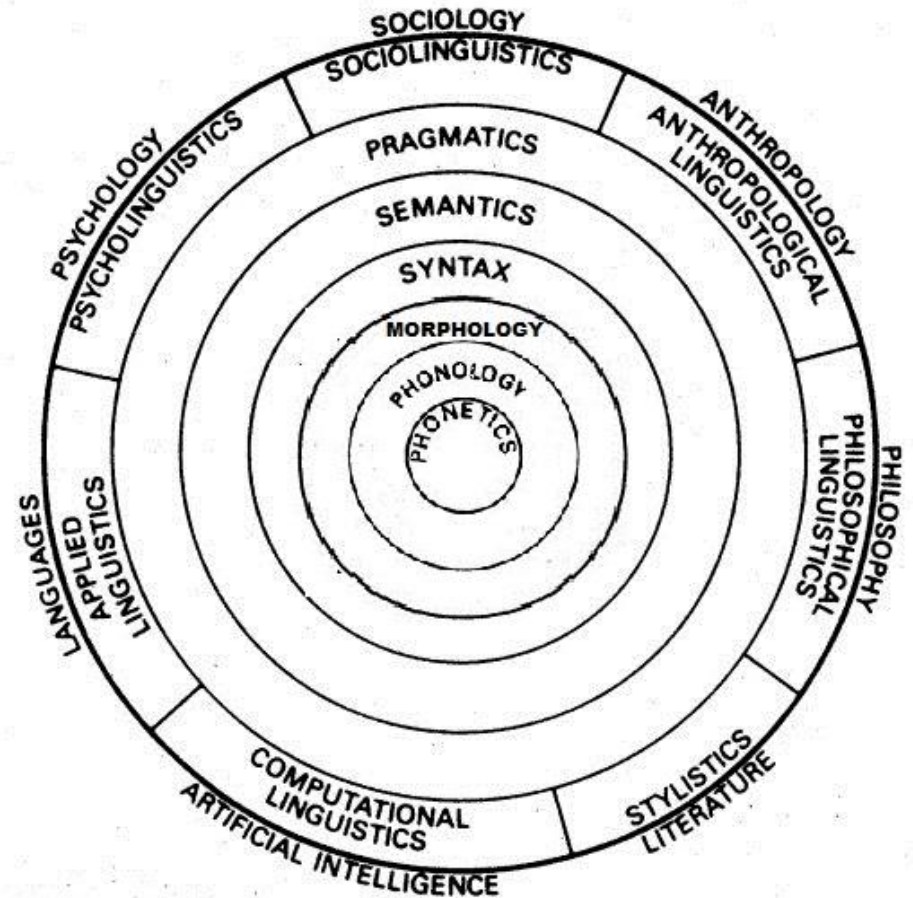
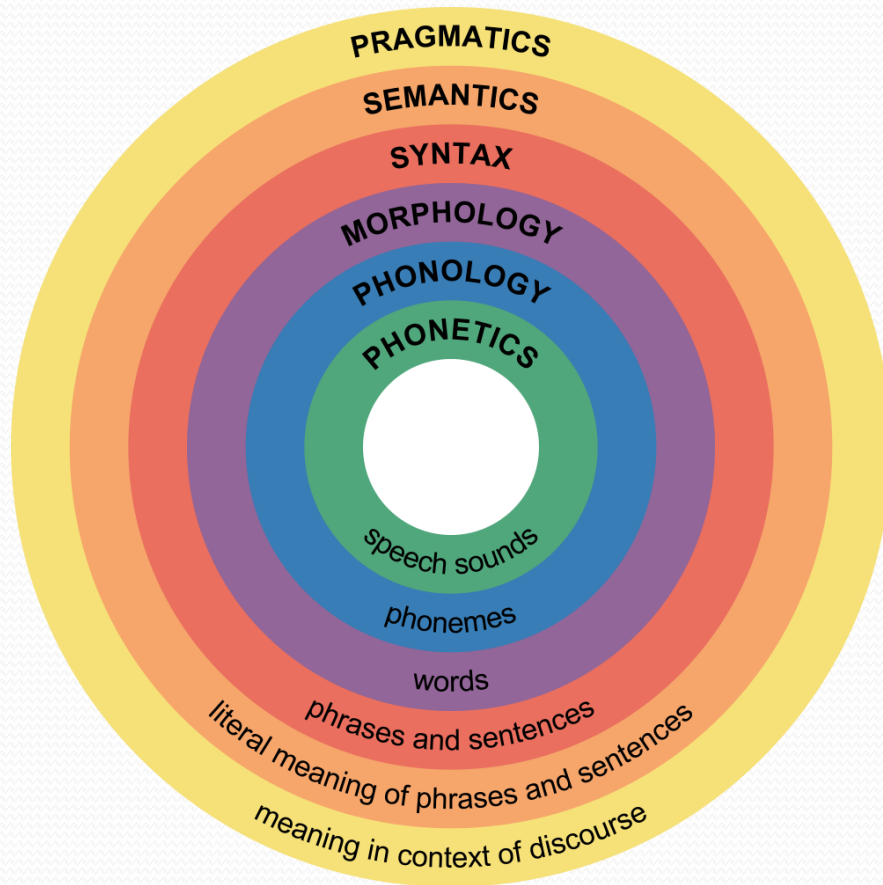
- **Stylistics** is the study of how literary effects can be related to linguistic features. It usually refers to the study of written language, including literary text, but it also investigates spoken language sometimes.
- **Discourse analysis** (*text linguistics*) is the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which language is used. It deals with how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units.



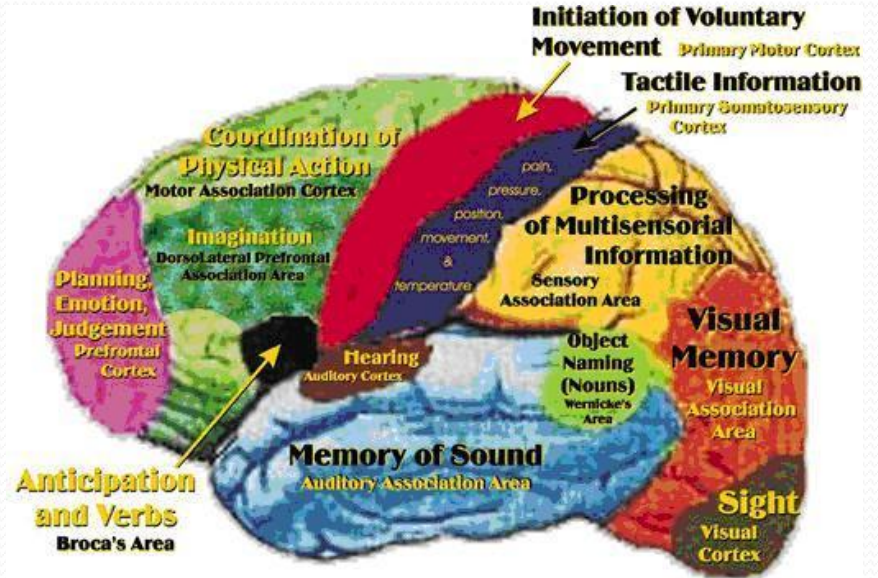
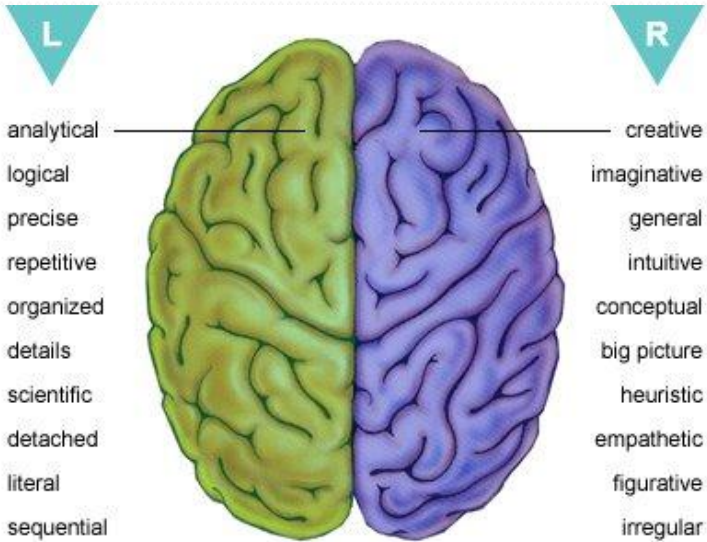
- **Computational linguistics** is an approach to linguistics which employs mathematical techniques, often with the help of a computer.
- **Cognitive linguistics** is an approach to the analysis of natural language that focuses on language as an instrument for organising, processing, and conveying information.
- **Applied linguistics** is the study of language related issues applied in everyday life, primarily concerned with the application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to the elucidation of language problems which have arisen in other areas of experience.



Scope of Linguistics

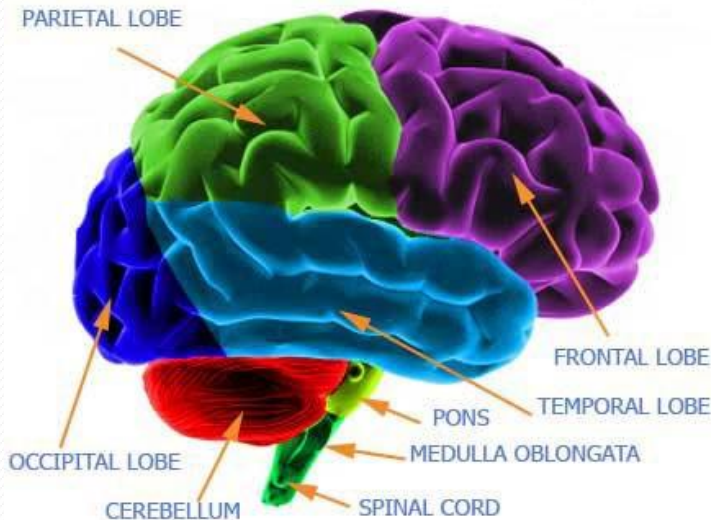


The Brain



Concept by: Silvia Helena Cardoso, PhD
Center for Biomedical Information, University of Campinas, Brazil

Brain Map Review – Wizard of Ads Academy



References

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