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Introduction to English Linguistics

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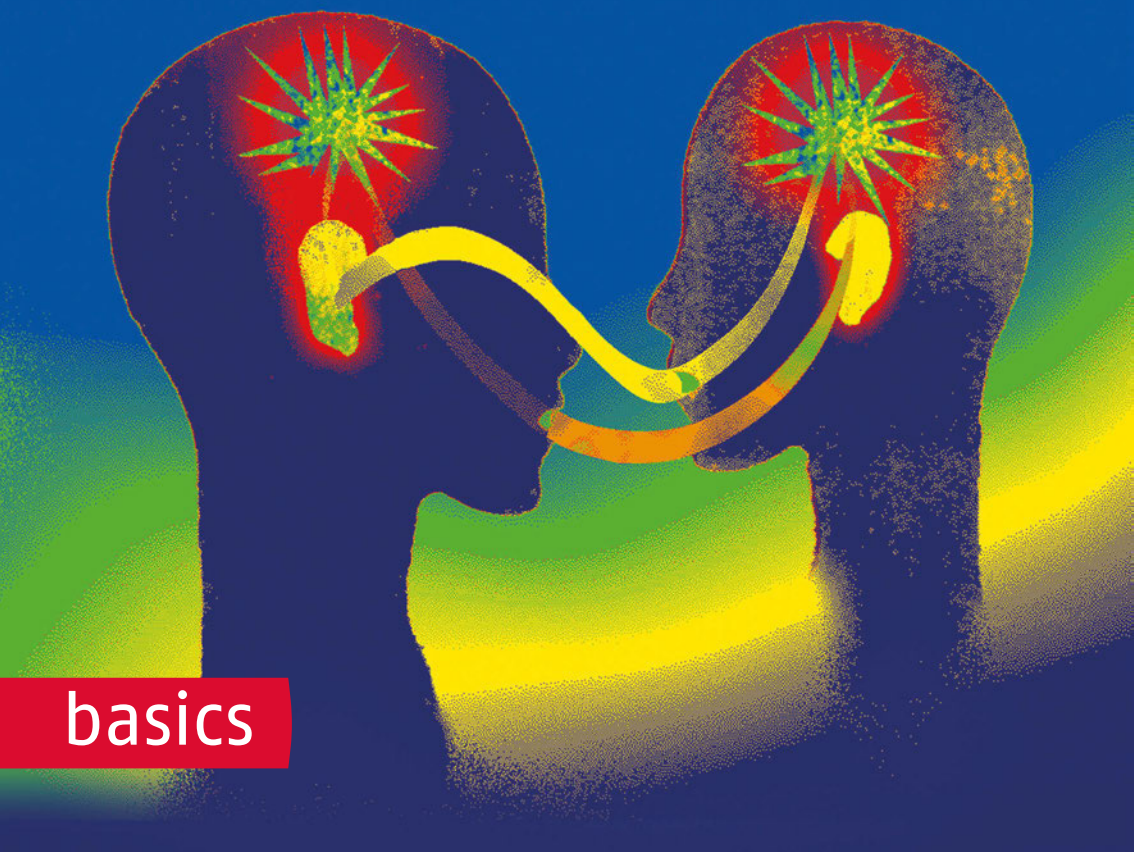

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Markus Bieswanger
Annette Becker

Introduction to English Linguistics

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Markus Bieswanger ist Professor für Englische Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Bayreuth, **Annette Becker** ist Akademische Mitarbeiterin am Institut für Mehrsprachigkeit der Pädagogischen Hochschule Karlsruhe.

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Contents

Prefaces

This textbook is intended for beginning students of English linguistics, and for their instructors. It is specifically designed to accompany introductory classes to linguistics and does not require any previous knowledge. The text is easily accessible, as it is written in user-friendly English. Moreover, it contains numerous examples and around 140 figures. It goes without saying that a brief introductory textbook cannot and thus should not even attempt to cover all details of a growing and increasingly fragmented discipline like linguistics. This book is meant as a starting point that introduces beginners to the core branches and central concepts of the field, addressing

- what linguists are interested in,
- how the English language has been evolving,
- how we produce and use speech sounds,
- how we may form words,
- how we may form sentences,
- what sounds, words and sentences have to do with meaning,
- how language is used in context,
- and what language has to do with social factors.

Key terms are highlighted in **bold letters**, whereas examples are given in *italics*. The index lists all key terms and the names of the most important authors mentioned in the text. At the end of each chapter, you will find exercises (complete with answers in the appendix) and an annotated bibliography directing you to sources of more detailed information and further reading. The selection of the material is based on our teaching experience. Individual chapters may, for the most part, be read independently of each other, although we suggest that readers follow the order as presented in the book.

We are indebted to our students, colleagues and friends for many inspiring questions, discussions and suggestions. Our special

thanks go to Werner Bauer, Anita Fetzer, James Fisk, Marlis Hellinger, Jan Hoffmeister, Gerda Lauerbach, Ursula Lenker, Sylvia Mieszkowski, Carolina Plaza-Pust, Gregory Poarch, Nicola Prendergast, Michael Schiffmann, Britta Schneider, Jule Türke and Christine Vogt-William for their valuable comments on earlier versions of the individual chapters. We would also like to thank our editor Jürgen Freudl for his amazing patience and professional support, and Sibylle Klöcker for her help with compiling the index. All remaining shortcomings of the book are, of course, entirely our own responsibility.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for future editions, please feel free to contact us at Annette.Becker@ruhr-uni-bochum.de and markus.bieswanger@uni-flensburg.de.

Annette Becker & Markus Bieswanger

Preface to the Second Edition

For the second edition of this textbook, we have updated the annotated bibliographies at the end of each chapter and revised some explanations and figures. However, to ensure compatibility with the first edition, changes have been kept to a necessary minimum. We would like to thank colleagues and students from a number of different universities – too numerous to name them all individually – who used our book in introductory classes and gave generously of their time to supply us with valuable feedback. Your effort is very much appreciated, even though we have been unable to accommodate everything that has been suggested to us. Questions, comments and suggestions for future editions are still more than welcome and may be sent to the email addresses given at the end of the original preface.

Markus Bieswanger & Annette Becker

Preface to the Third Edition

This third edition continues to follow the overall plan of the previous editions. All chapters of the second edition as well as the bibliographies at the end of each chapter have been updated and several exercises have been revised. The chapter on syntax has been substantially rewritten and now focuses more on traditional approaches to syntactic analysis and their application. We are indebted to those who assisted in the preparation of this edition. In addition to the individuals we thanked in the prefaces to the previous editions, we would like to specifically thank Carina Farrero, Guido Isekenmeier, Verena Minow, Jonathan Mole and Julia Salzinger for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of the new chapter on syntax. We would like to invite you to continue to send comments and suggestions for future editions to the email addresses given at the end of the original preface.

Markus Bieswanger & Annette Becker

Preface to the Fourth Edition

Just as the previous editions of this textbook, the fourth edition presents central aspects of English linguistics in a clear and accessible way, hopefully inspiring readers to dig deeper into the subject of linguistics and its many fascinating branches. Text and exercises have been revised where necessary, and all bibliographies have been updated, including the addition of a number of new references. We wish to thank all colleagues, students and readers who generously gave us their feedback and support. Our special thanks go to Kristina Kähm, Lucia Kornexl, Verena Minow and Hans Sauer for their helpful hints, and to our editor Kathrin Heyng. Further comments and suggestions are more than welcome and should be sent to bieswanger@uni-bayreuth.de and abecker@uni-wuppertal.de.

Markus Bieswanger & Annette Becker

Preface to the Fifth Edition

The fifth edition has been updated and revised, preserving the structure of the book and at the same time reflecting recent developments in linguistics. We would like to thank our editor and the publisher for their support in preparing this edition. Special thanks go to our readers for their valuable feedback on the fourth edition, and to Luana Ebert for her assistance in updating the text, the exercises, and the bibliographies. Please send your comments on the fifth edition and suggestions for future editions to bieswanger@uni-bayreuth.de and annette.becker@ph-karlsruhe.de.

Markus Bieswanger & Annette Becker

Introduction 1

Contents

Abstract

This chapter defines the scope of linguistics and gives a brief overview of the branches and central concepts of the discipline.

1.1 | What is Linguistics?

"From a linguist's viewpoint *Homo sapiens*, the 'rational' or 'knowing' species, is above all *Homo loquens*, the 'talking' species."
(Matthews 2003:14)

Linguistics is all about human **language**, that means it is primarily concerned with the uniquely human capacity to express ideas and feelings by voluntarily produced speech sounds or their equivalents, such as gestures in sign languages used by deaf persons. Linguistics can be broadly defined as **the scientific study of language** or **of particular languages**. Scholars who systematically study language usually refer to themselves as **linguists**. Compare the following definitions from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*:

> lin·guist /lɪŋgwɪst/ *noun*
> 1 a person who knows several foreign languages well: *She's an excellent linguist.* ◊ *I'm afraid I'm no linguist* (= I find foreign languages difficult).
> 2 a person who studies languages or linguistics

In this book, we will use the term *linguist* as defined by the second of the above dictionary entries. From the point of view of linguistics, a linguist does thus not necessarily have to speak many different languages fluently, just as a professional geographer does not have to know the location of all the rivers, towns and cities in the world by heart.

Humans in all parts of the world have been interested in language for thousands of years and have developed a wide variety of perspectives in language studies. As a result, linguists today approach language from a vast and growing number of different angles or specialise in certain aspects of language.

1.2 | Branches of Linguistics

Traditional Core Branches

The field of linguistics encompasses a wide range of "ways" to study language, which are reflected in the subdivision of linguistics into **branches** (or **subfields**). Traditionally, linguists identify five **core branches** of linguistics, **phonetics** (namely the study of speech sounds in general), **phonology** (the study of the sound systems of individual languages), **morphology** (the study of the cre-

ation, structure and form of words), **syntax** (the study of structural units larger than one word, i.e. phrases and sentences), and **semantics** (the study of word and sentence meaning). This is also the order in which these fields appear in Chapter 3 to 6 in this book. We will thus pursue a bottom-up approach, starting with speech sounds, i.e. the smallest units of language, and working our way up towards larger structures of language:

Fig. 1.1

branch	**phonetics**	**phonology**	**morphology**	**syntax**	**semantics**
concerned with	speech sounds in general	sound systems of languages	words and their components	phrases and sentences	word and sentence meaning

Traditional core branches of linguistics (simplified)

Expanding the Core

These core areas of linguistic study, however, are not the only branches that are subsumed under the umbrella term *linguistics*. A number of branches of linguistics have appeared in recent years and decades, of which **pragmatics** (the study of meaning in context) and **sociolinguistics** (the study of the relationship between language and society) have been selected for this book, as they are among the most dynamic and widely studied subfields of linguistics today. Many linguists now include both pragmatics and sociolinguistics when they speak about the core branches of linguistics.

More Branches

Similarly to sociolinguistics, which has developed as a result of overlapping interests of linguistics and sociology, many other branches of linguistics have been set up to describe **interdisciplinary approaches**: for example, anthropological linguistics (anthropology and linguistics), biolinguistics (biology and linguistics), clinical linguistics (medicine and linguistics), computational linguistics (computer science and linguistics), ethnolinguistics (ethnology and linguistics), media linguistics (media studies and linguistics), philosophical linguistics (philosophy and linguistics) and psycholinguistics (psychology and linguistics), to name only a few.

Different Kinds of Branches

The branches of linguistics we have mentioned so far belong for the most part to the traditional core or have developed from the collaboration of linguistics and a neighbouring field of study. We

will now briefly turn to two examples of branches that are distinguished for other reasons, namely **applied linguistics** and **corpus linguistics**.

Applied linguistics can be broadly defined as the branch of linguistics that seeks to solve language-related problems in the real world. Originally, applied linguistics essentially focussed on the relevance of linguistic study for language teaching, particularly foreign language teaching, but has since much expanded its scope. Other fields of application now include, for example, the linguistic analysis of language disorders and the planning of national language policies. Today, the label "applied" in the broader sense is occasionally even used in combination with other branches of linguistics, as in applied psycholinguistics or applied sociolinguistics.

Corpus linguistics, on the other hand, is not defined by the possible application of the results of linguistic study, but by the methodology used. A corpus is a collection of authentic language material, now frequently in the form of machine-readable databases. Corpus linguists are interested in actual language use. For example, linguists can search these corpora for all occurrences of a certain linguistic feature and interpret both the number of occurrences as well as the context in which such a feature occurs.

The variety of approaches and specialisations frequently shows in differences in terminology. In this book, we will, wherever possible, use widely accepted terminology that can be found in most international textbooks of linguistics. However, it has to be kept in mind that there is some variation in the use of linguistic terminology, even among linguists. We will point out some of the most important cases of terminological variation as we go along.

1.3 | Central Concepts of Linguistics

Ferdinand de Saussure

Linguistics at the beginning of the 21st century is still to a large extent based on the ideas of the Swiss linguist **Ferdinand de Saussure** (1857–1913), which were responsible for a fundamental change of direction of linguistic study in the early 20th century. This holds particularly true for linguistics as viewed from a European perspective. Saussure's ideas were only published after his death, when some of his students compiled the *Cours de linguistique*

générale (or *Course in General Linguistics*) from his lecture materials in 1916. Many linguists have since considered Saussure the founder of modern linguistics.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)

Fig. 1.2

Synchrony versus Diachrony

One of the major changes brought about by Saussure's ideas is the distinction between the study of languages at a certain point in time called **synchrony** (or **synchronic linguistics**), and the study of language change over time termed **diachrony** (or **diachronic linguistics**, or **historical linguistics**). Saussure's call for the primacy of synchrony led to a paradigm shift from a predominantly historical orientation of linguistics in the 19th century to a predominantly synchronic orientation of linguistics in the 20th and 21st century. Historical linguistics has not completely ceased to exist, but it is now rather based on systematic synchronic descriptions at different points in time during the history of a language.

"The object of study in linguistics is not a combination of the written and the spoken word. The spoken word alone constitutes that object."
(Saussure 1916:24–25)

Spoken versus Written Language

Another major change was caused by Saussure's call for the **primacy of the spoken word**. Most linguistic study in the 19th century had been concerned with the written form of language, but Saussure (1983:24) insisted that "[t]he sole reason for the existence of the latter [i.e. the written form] is to represent the former [i.e. the spoken form]". This notion is of fundamental importance to Saussure's model of the linguistic sign (cf. Fig. 1.3).

Prescriptivism versus Descriptivism

A further fundamental change of direction in linguistic study that is connected with Saussure's ideas, and the last we would like to mention here, is the transition from a **prescriptive** (or normative) period of linguistics to a **descriptive** approach. Descriptive linguistics aims to describe the facts of linguistic usage as they are

in practice, whereas prescriptive linguistics attempts to prescribe rules of "correctness", i.e. to lay down normative rules as to how language should be used. Since the beginning of the 20th century, linguistics has been increasingly critical of **prescriptivism** and has been favouring the approach of **descriptivism**.

Structuralism

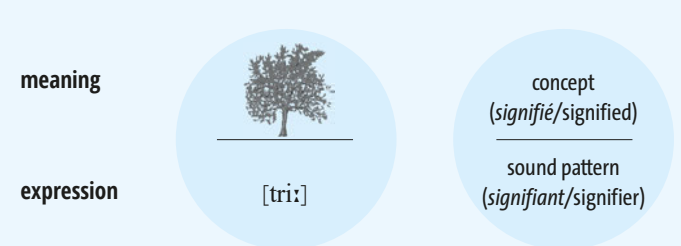
At the heart of Saussure's ideas is the focus of linguistics on the **structure** of the language system shared by members of a certain speech community. This is why the Saussurean type of linguistics is also referred to as **structural linguistics** (or **structuralist linguistics**). The centre of study is the **language system** (or ***langue***) and not the concrete **language use** by the individual (or ***parole***). Structural linguistics aims at the description and analysis of all elements of the language system and the relationships that exist between them. These elements and their interrelationships are investigated at all structural levels of linguistics, such as sounds, words and sentences.

The Linguistic Sign

Related to Saussure's call for the primacy of the spoken word is another one of his groundbreaking contributions to modern linguistics, namely his model of the **linguistic sign**. According to Saussure, the linguistic sign is made up of two inseparably connected parts, like two sides of a coin. The linguistic sign consists of a sound or usually a **sound sequence** (or **sound pattern**), the so-called ***signifiant*** (or **signifier**), at the level of expression, and a **concept**, the so-called ***signifié*** (or **signified**), at the level of meaning:

Fig. 1.3

Saussure's model of the linguistic sign (adapted from Saussure 1983:67)



Arbitrariness

Saussure emphasises that there is no internal natural link between the sound shape and the meaning of the linguistic sign. Neither does the form of a word dictate its meaning, nor is the meaning predictable from the form. This is illustrated by the fact that the same concept can be referred to by completely different

sound patterns in different languages. For example, the same animal that can be represented by [dɒg] in English, is usually referred to as [hʊnt] in German and [ʃjɛ̃] in French. The relationship between the sound pattern and the concept is thus said to be **arbitrary**. The principle of **arbitrariness** of the linguistic sign states that the connection between the sound pattern and the concept of a sign is by **convention** only.

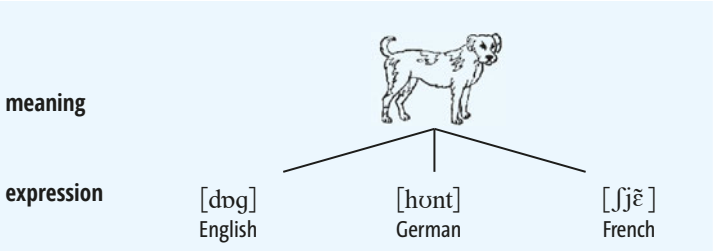


Fig. 1.4
Arbitrariness of the linguistic sign

Onomatopoeia

There are, however, a small number of expressions for which the principle of arbitrariness does not hold completely true. Words such as *boom* [buːm] or *bang* [bæŋ] show at least a partial correspondence of sound pattern and meaning. Such expressions which include sounds that are similar to the noises they describe are called **onomatopoeic**. **Onomatopoeia** is thus frequently cited as an exception to the principle of arbitrariness.

Post-Saussurean Developments

The important influence of Saussure's ideas and structuralist linguistic thinking on modern linguistics is essentially undisputed. However, at least two other influential linguistic schools of thought have to be mentioned when we speak about the discipline of linguistics since the beginning of the 20th century.

Functionalism

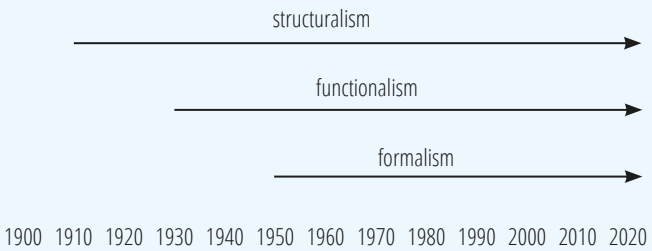
One of the other important schools of thought started to develop around 1930 and is commonly referred to as **functionalism** (or **Prague School of functionalism**). Functionalism partly continues structuralist ideas but focuses on the function or functions of language and individual linguistic features. For example, the so-called organon model of languages as suggested by Karl Bühler distinguishes between three main functions of language: an expressive function that allows the addressers to express their own beliefs and feelings, a representative function that allows us to talk about the world, and an appellative function that allows the addresser to make a request or issue a command.

Generative Linguistics

Since the 1950s, a linguistic school of thought called **generative linguistics** (or **formalism**) has become increasingly influential, particularly in American linguistics. The term generative was introduced by Noam Chomsky in his book *Syntactic Structures* in 1957. Extremely simplified, we can say that the generative approach reflects the fact that all speakers of a language can produce, or generate, a theoretically unlimited number of grammatical sentences from a limited number of means, i.e. words and the rules for their combination. Chomsky distinguishes between **competence**, the knowledge we have of the language we grow up with, and **performance**, the speech we actually produce. Our complete knowledge of our native language is often also referred to as our **grammar**. Generative linguistics is traditionally most influential in the subfield of syntax.

Fig. 1.5

Structuralism, functionalism and formalism (adapted from Kortmann 2020:20)



Today, structuralism, functionalism and formalism exist side by side in modern linguistics, as indicated in Fig. 1.5. Additionally, the interest in historical linguistics has been on the rise since the early 1990s. Historical linguistics now incorporates findings and methods developed in different branches of synchronic linguistics, making use of language corpora and forming new subfields such as historical semantics, historical pragmatics and historical sociolinguistics.

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