Linguistics for Communication

Introduction
(2023/2024)

Lecturer

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Lectures:

- Wednesday 16:30 – 18:30 (Room 8)

- Friday 08:30 – 10:30 (Room 7)

Start of activities: 28/02/2024 – End of activities: 17/05/2024

Office hours:

- Monday 10:30 – 12:30 (Room 40)

SYLLABUS

1. **Language, Languages, and Linguistics: basic concepts and definitions**

2. **System and Structure: how languages work**

   2.1 Phonetics and Phonology

   a) How speech sounds are produced (sounds and phones; the vocal apparatus; vowels and consonants);
   b) How speech sounds are organized into patterns (the speech chain; phonemes and allophones; syllable; stress).

   2.2 Morphology

   a) What is a 'word'?

   b) The structure of words (morphemes and allomorphs);

   c) Inflection;

   d) How new words are created (derivation, compounding, and other strategies; neologisms; meaning extension and change).

   2.3 Lexicology and Semantics

   a) Semantic relations between words (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy);

   b) Mental lexicon and grouping of words;

   c) Italian lexicon: latinisms, borrowed words, and word frequency .

   2.4 Discourse

   a) Coherence;

   b) Cohesion.

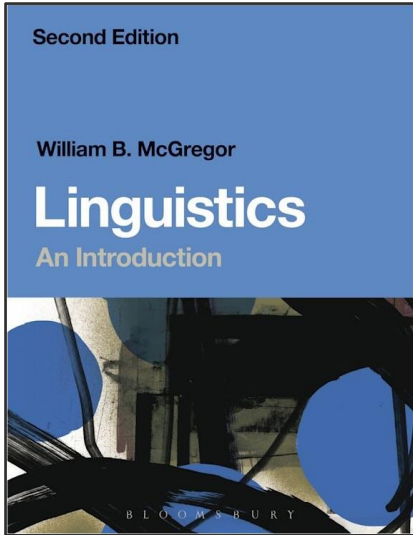3. **Pragmatics: complexity and nuances of human communication**

   a) The importance of 'context';

   b) Speech acts;

   c) Cooperative principle;

   d) Implicatures and presuppositions.

4. **A basic description of the linguistic features found in the News**

   a) News story structures;

   b) Conciseness strategies;

   c) What makes an event newsworthy;
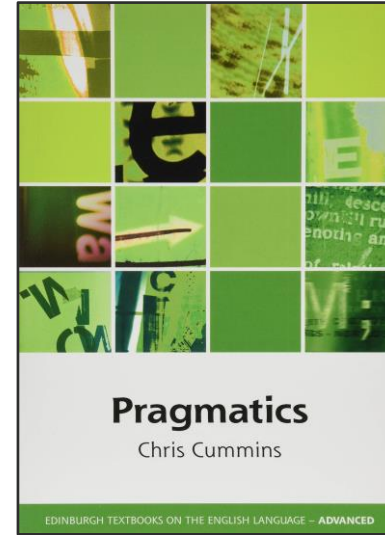
   d) Reported speech.

William B. McGregor

Linguistics
An Introduction

Bloomsbury, 2015 [2nd Edition]

- Chapter 1   Introduction
- Chapter 2   Sounds of Language
- Chapter 3   Structure of Words
- Chapter 4   Lexicon
- Chapter 5   Structure of Sentences
- Chapter 6   Meaning
- Chapter 7   Sociolinguistics
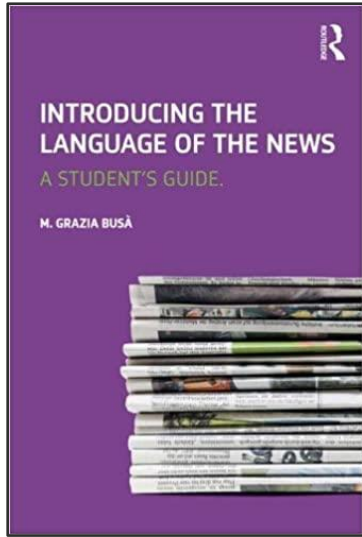- Chapter 8   Text and Discourse

Chris Cummins

Pragmatics

Edinburgh University Press, 2019

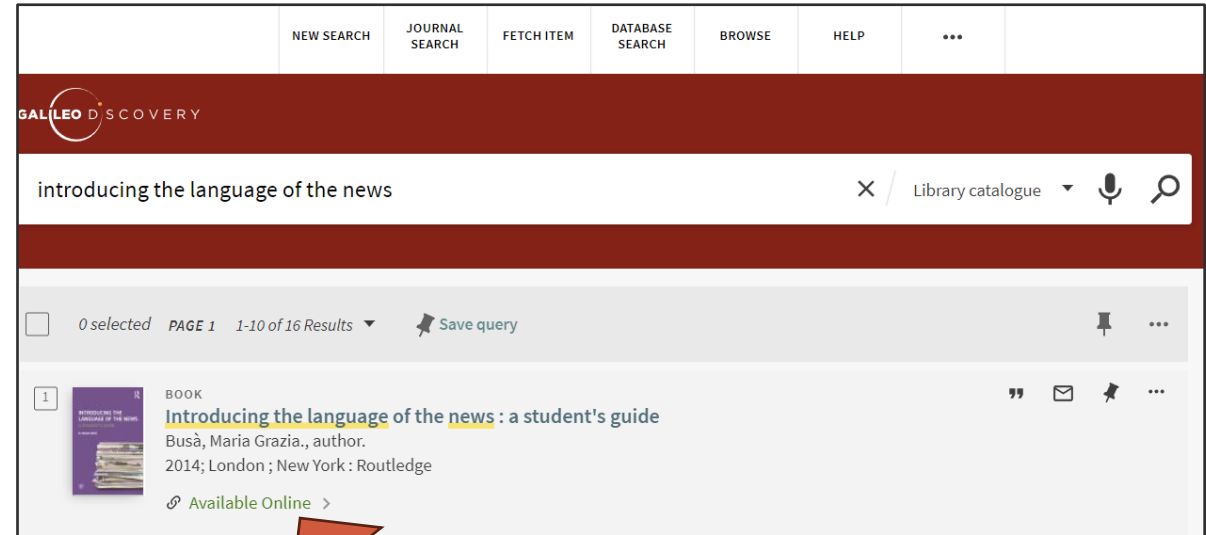Precise information about the pages to study will be given during the course

The **reading materials** uploaded on Moodle and the **slides** shown during lectures are **integral** to the course

M. Grazia Busà

Introducing the Language of the News

A Student's Guide

Routledge, 2014

Chapters: 2; 5; 7; 8; 9

The **reading materials** uploaded on Moodle and the **slides** shown during lectures are **integral** to the course

Linguistics is the **scientific** study of **language**

Linguistics analyses:

- How **language** works

- What **rules** govern language ⟶ What **grammar** is

- How words and sentences convey **meaning**

- How meaning is influenced by **context**

Linguistics is considered a **scientific** discipline

- It employs an empirical and objective methodology

- It seeks to uncover patterns in the use of languages, develop hypotheses to explain these patterns, and test them

- It doesn't have any preconceived notions or bias

Linguistics adopts a critical and rigorous approach
that is coherent with the scientific method

↓

objectivity and **empirical** basis

Linguistics aims to provide an **accurate description** of how languages are used **in practice**.

It is not interested in prescribing how they **should** be used

Prescriptive approach **VS** Descriptive approach

Advocates for the "**proper way**" to speak or write

Does not aim to dictate the correct use of language, but instead to **observe**, **describe**, and **explain** linguistic behavior

Grammar taught in school

Linguistics

Lui prepara la cena ✗

Lui prepara la cena ✓

Egli prepara la cena ✓

Egli prepara la cena ✓

Ain't nobody got time for that ✗

Ain't nobody got time for that ✓

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Summary

Linguistics is a **scientific discipline** that seeks to understand

how language works and how it is used in practice.

Linguists use an **empirical** and **objective** methodology to study language,

and they adopt a **descriptive approach** that seeks to describe and explain linguistic behavior,

rather than prescribe it.

When you think of "language," what comes to mind?

Italian, English, the language of mathematics, computer language, body language, the language of love…

Languages are
- a means of communication used to convey meaning and express thoughts and ideas
- a fundamental aspect of human society and culture

A language consists of a set of **symbols**, and **rules** for combining them.

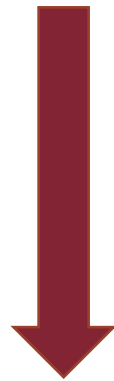These rules are what constitute the language's **grammar**.

An intricate network of knowledge that underlies our ability to use language:
It allows us to produce and interpret an unlimited number of sentences.

Grammatical competence

Knowledge of the rules necessary to create well-formed sentences

Communicative competence

Ability to create messages that are appropriate for the purpose and context at hand

I am reaching out to inquire about your availability for a meeting

✓ Writing to a Professor ✓

✓ Talking to a friend ✗

Dual nature of languages

- Expressions of the faculty of language, that is part of every human's **psychological** structure

- **Social** products rooted in human groups → Languages evolve differently in response to cultural, social, and historical factors

All languages share some fundamental
design features and **structural characteristics**
that are processed by the brain in similar ways.

They all have phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic levels,
comprised of the same elements and structured according to the same general **rules**

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A complex instance of animal communication is that of **honeybees**.

When a bee finds food, it goes back to its hive and begins to "dance".
The movements are strictly **codified**:
they indicate direction, distance, and quality of the food source

communication

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/whats-the-waggle-dance-and-why-do-honeybees/

The exchange of information between bees is perfectly **functional** to their needs.
However, it is **not comparable** in scale, complexity, and adaptability to human language

Sound and **meaning** of a language are two distinct but interrelated levels of every linguistic system. Meaningful elements, such as words, can be produced by combining meaningless sounds.

Dual structure:
a lower level made of **meaningless** sounds,
an upper level that contains **meaningful** units

The sounds [d], [ɔ], and [g] don't have any meaning on their own;
if we link them together we obtain a word, *dog*, which evokes a well-defined meaning.

The two levels are correlated. If we change the sound [d] to [f], we also change the meaning (*fog*)

Humans are able to communicate about events and things that are **not present**, distant in time or space, and even imaginary or false.

Human language is primarily controlled by **internal concepts**, rather than by external prompts.

Animals, on the other hand, are largely **stimulus-bound**

Productivity enables us to generate new meanings by producing novel expressions and utterances: they are **generated**, and not drawn from memory. We are not bound to an already existing repertoire.

What does this imply?

1. We can understand sentences we have never heard before:
   we share the same **grammar knowledge**,
   and we have therefore access to the rules necessary to **encode** and **decode** any new message.

2. Speakers can invent **new words** to express **new ideas** and refer to new objects and events.
   Think of the words coined in recent years to talk about computers and the Internet.

Animal communication systems are non-productive and do not allow for
the creation of new combinations of signs or the invention of new signs

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Recursion allows linguistic elements to be **combined repeatedly**,
producing an infinite variety of sentences of **indefinite length**

Recursion is the process of embedding a linguistic unit within another to make it longer

For example, a simple sentence can be expanded endlessly by applying the rules of coordination

Mark is tall

Mark is tall and strong

Mark is tall and strong and handsome

And so on…

Although the human brain is **finite**,
recursion allows us to produce and understand an **infinite** number of sentences

Language can convey information about itself

Right now, we are using a language to talk about language

See also sentences such as

that word is not polite

what does that word mean?

Summary

The key properties of human language include
duality, displacement, productivity, recursion, and reflexivity.

- Duality: **sound** and **meaning** are two distinct but interrelated levels of every linguistic system

- Displacement: ability to communicate about things that are **not present**

- Productivity and recursion enable us to generate **new meanings** and intricate sentences.

- Reflexivity: ability to **talk about language itself**

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- **Phonetics**: how speech sounds are produced

- **Phonology**: how speech sounds are patterned in a specific language

- **Morphology**: how words are structured and created

- **Syntax**: how words combine into phrases and sentences

- **Semantics**: how meaning is encoded into words and sentences

- **Pragmatics**: how context affects meaning

- **Sociolinguistics**: how social phenomena influence language variation

- **Discourse analysis**: study of the interactional nature of language

- **Psycholinguistics** and **Neurolinguistics**: study of the mental processes involved in language production

- **Language acquisition**: study of how children acquire their first language

- **Historical linguistics**: study of how languages change over time

- **Applied linguistics**: various practical subfields