

Lecture Notes:

- **Language:**
- **Language** is the knowledge of sounds (**phonetics, phonology**).
- When you know a language or are a native speaker of that language, you have the knowledge of the sounds of that language. Furthermore, you know which sounds exist in that language.
I.e. When you know a language, you know which sounds are part of the language.
- E.g.

English speakers know that *t* is a sound in their language, but not *ɣ* (a voiced velar fricative).
Japanese speakers know that *t* is part of their language but *th* is not.

- In addition, you know which sound combinations are possible in your language.
- E.g.

English speakers know that words in English can start with *str-*, *spl-*, or *sk-* but not **rts-*, **lps-* or **ks-*

- **Language** is also the knowledge of word structure (**morphology**).
- When you know a language, you know which words are possible and which words are not.
- E.g.

im-mobile-ity but not **ity-mobile-im*
un-deny-ab-ly but not **deny-ly*.

- **Language** is also the knowledge of sentence structure (**syntax**).
- Speakers of a language also know which combinations of words are possible and which combinations are not.
- E.g.

This student is difficult to teach. → *It is difficult to teach this student.*
This student is anxious to leave. → **It is anxious to leave this student.*

Note: The sentence "This student is anxious to leave." is grammatical while the sentence "It is anxious to leave this student." is ungrammatical.
Therefore, knowing a language means being able to judge grammatical vs ungrammatical sentences.

- We use our knowledge of sentence structure every time we speak, creating sentences that have never been uttered or heard before.
- **Language** is also the knowledge of meanings (**semantics**).
- Speakers can recognize ambiguities in meaning.

- E.g.

John ate the ice cream on the table.

MEANING 1 = On the table, John ate the ice cream.

MEANING 2 = John ate the ice cream that was placed on the table.

- **Language** is also the knowledge of real-world usage (**pragmatics**).
- Speakers are aware of different levels of formality in their first language and know when to use them.
- E.g. Compare the sentences "Pass the salt vs Could you please pass me the salt?" A native speaker would know that "Pass the salt" is used in an informal context whereas "Could you please pass me the salt?" is used in a formal context.
- **Grammar:**
- For linguists, **grammar** is a mental system that allows speakers of a language to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences including those that have never been heard or uttered before.
- Grammar is a system of rules.
- Components of grammar:

| Component | Domain |
|------------|---|
| Phonetics | The articulation and perception of speech sounds. |
| Phonology | The patterning of speech sounds. |
| Morphology | Word formation. |
| Syntax | Sentence formation. |
| Semantics | The interpretation of words and sentences. |

- There are two approaches to grammar:
 - 1. Prescriptive:**
 - **Prescriptive grammar** is about should and shouldn'ts.
I.e. How you should speak and how you shouldn't speak.
 - Arguments put forth by prescriptive grammarians in defense of their preferences:
 - One form is more logical than another.
 - There is a preference for older forms of the language.
 - There is an injunction against the use of foreign words.
 - For English, they propose rules such as:
 - Don't end a sentence with a preposition.
E.g.
What are you looking at? (Unacceptable)
At what you are looking? (Acceptable)
E.g.
Who are you talking to? (Unacceptable)
To whom are you talking? (Acceptable)

2. Don't split an infinitive. An **infinitive** is "to + base form of a verb."
E.g. Make sure to carefully read the document. (Unacceptable)
3. Two negatives make a positive.
E.g. I didn't see nobody. (Unacceptable)

2. Descriptive:

- Favoured by linguists. Linguists are descriptive grammarians.
- A **descriptive approach** studies and characterizes the actual language of specific groups of people in a range of situations.
- It does not bring any preconceived notions of correctness to the task.
- It does not favor the language of one social group as somehow "better" than those of others. All varieties/forms are equal.
- The descriptive approach talks about do's and don't's and studies how the language is actually used.
- Descriptive grammarians counter the above prescriptive claims with the following:
 - All varieties of a language are valid systems with their own logic and conventions.
 - There is no strong reason to expect one language to match the mold of another.
 - Languages are continually changing in subtle ways without reducing their usefulness, preciseness or aesthetic value.
- **Standard Language:**
- **Standard language** is the variety of a language spoken by the most powerful group in a community and generally held to be 'correct' by prescriptive grammarians.
- The reasons for choosing one variety over another are mostly social and political.
- Standard or prestige varieties are usually based on the speech of the rich, powerful, and highly educated members of a society (political elite or upper class).
- **Formal vs Informal:**
- Most, if not all, languages and dialects have ways of expressing formality as well as familiarity.
- Informal speech is not incorrect, it simply has a different usage from formal speech. Thus, informal speech is still grammatical.
- E.g.
I ain't got time. (Informal & grammatical)
Ain't got I time. (Ungrammatical)
- E.g.
Pass the salt. (Informal & grammatical)
Could you please pass me the salt? (Formal & grammatical)
- **Grammatical vs. Ungrammatical:**
- A **grammatical sentence** conforms to grammatical rules of a language, while an ungrammatical sentence does not.
- Note that grammaticality is judged with respect to a particular speaker or dialect. Certain combinations that are ungrammatical in one dialect may be perfectly grammatical in another dialect.
I.e. A sentence that is judged ungrammatical in one dialect may be grammatical in another.

Textbook Notes:

- **Introduction:**
- **Language** is an essential part of what it means to be human. We use language to communicate, listen, read, and write. Language helps us build communities and relationships, allowing us to bond and grow.
- **Linguistics** is a study of all things related to language - how humans speak, the underlying structure of language, how children acquire it, how it changes over time, and so on.
- When you are a native speaker of a language:
 1. You know the sounds of that language. You know which sounds do and do not exist in that language. You also know which sound combinations are possible in your language.
 2. Moreover, you are aware of words and word combinations, and whether certain combinations of words are or are not possible.
 3. Additionally, you know which strings of words are meaningful constructions, and which are not.

E.g. Compare the 2 sentences below:

1. The man has seen the dog.
2. Seen man the has dog the.

Native speakers will know that the first sentence is grammatical and meaningful while the second sentence is ungrammatical since it does not follow certain principles (rules) of the English language.

- As a native speaker of a language, you know whether a sentence is **ambiguous** or not. E.g. Any native speaker of English knows that the following sentence is ambiguous, and therefore has two meanings.

The tourist saw the astronomer with the binoculars.

Meaning 1: The tourist used the binoculars to see the astronomer.

Meaning 2: The astronomer that the tourist saw had the binoculars.

Note that this linguistic knowledge is unconscious. That is, people speaking a specific language are able to explain what constructions are correct or incorrect in that language, but they are not able to explain why. This unconscious knowledge is also called

competence.

- When you know a language, you also have knowledge of the real-world usage. You can make a distinction between **familiarity** and **formality**. E.g. You are aware that the first sentence below is used in an informal context, while the second sentence below is used in a formal one.

1. What y'all watchin?

2. What are all of you watching?

The above sentences are examples of **register/style**. The first sentence indicates an informal register while the second one is an example of formal register. **Register/style** refers to the levels of formality. **Register** is a variety of language used in very particular social settings.

Note: It's not just the informal register that is restricted to certain situations; it can be equally inappropriate to use a formal register in casual situations.

- **Grammar:**
- **Grammar** has various distinct meanings. For linguists, **grammar** is a mental system of rules that exists in the head of native speakers. This system of rules allows native

speakers of a language to produce and understand sentences that have never been produced or heard before. This is what we also call **mental grammar**. Our mental grammar consists of 5 main components:

1. **Phonetics**: Deals with the perception and articulation of speech sounds.
 2. **Phonology**: Deals with sound combinations, particularly which sound combinations are possible.
 3. **Morphology**: Deals with the structure of words.
 4. **Syntax**: Deals with the structure of sentences.
 5. **Semantics**: Deals with meaning and the interpretation of sentences.
- As you can see, grammar is a complex system of rules that governs how speakers organize sounds into words and words into sentences.
 - **Prescriptive Grammar/Traditional Grammar**:
 - Prescriptive grammarians believe in the absolute standard of correctness. This approach to grammar governs the version of English considered appropriate for use by educated speakers. Here, we are dealing with should(s) and shouldn't(s).
I.e. How you should speak and how you shouldn't speak.
 - In prescriptive grammar:
 - a. One form is more logical than another.
 - b. There is an appeal to classical forms.
 - c. There is a preference for older forms of the language.
 - d. There is an injunction against the use of foreign words (words borrowed from other languages)
 - According to this view, language is either correct or incorrect. Any educated person should be able to understand at once and faithfully follow the norms of correctness which are thought to be preserved in authorities' reference works such as dictionaries and handbooks.
 - E.g. Consider the sentence: Me and John went to the movies.
This sentence is not acceptable from a prescriptive point of view. From a prescriptive point of view, this sentence "should" be 'John and I went to the movies' since the pronoun 'me' cannot be used in the subject position of a sentence.
 - Examples of prescriptive rules:
 1. Don't end a sentence with a preposition.
 2. Don't split an infinitive (to+base form).
 3. Don't use double negatives. Two negatives make a positive.
 - **Note**: In this course, we are not concerned with prescriptive grammar. Instead, we make appeal to the concept of descriptive grammar.
 - **Descriptive Grammar**:
 - **Descriptive Grammar**: A descriptive approach which studies and characterizes the actual language of specific groups of people in a range of situations. It does not bring any preconceived notions of "correctness" to the task nor does it favour the language of one social group over others. It describes how grammatical systems operate. It also aims to record facts, describing the actual language (I.e. descriptive rules) as comprehensively as possible and avoids the law-giving tone of traditional textbook grammars.
 - Linguists are descriptive grammarians. When linguists write a grammar of a language, they attempt to describe the rules that govern the grouping of the words of that language into meaningful patterns.

- The term **descriptive grammar** refers to an objective, nonjudgmental description of the grammatical constructions in a language. It's an examination of how a language is actually being used, in writing and in speech.
- Descriptive linguists counter the prescriptivist claims with the following:
 - a. All varieties of a language are valid systems with their own logic and conventions.
 - b. There is no scientific reason to expect one language to match the mold of another.
 - c. Languages are continually changing in subtle ways without reducing their usefulness, precision or aesthetic value.
 - d. All languages have adopted words from other sources.
- **Note:** Both approaches to language studies involve rules, but prescriptive rules are about mandating language and descriptive rules are about describing it.
I.e. Descriptive rules tell us what speakers do and don't do while prescriptive rules tell us what speakers should and shouldn't do.
- Descriptive rules form the basis for grammaticality judgments (I.e. The opinion of a native speaker as to whether a given construction is well formed or not), which are always made relative to a particular dialect.
E.g. Something that is grammatical in Standard British English is not necessarily grammatical in Standard Canadian English or African-American Vernacular English, and so on.
- Example of descriptive rules:
 1. Articles such as "the" and "a" precede nouns in English.
 2. In English, adjectives come before nouns to modify them.
 3. The word order in English is Subject + Verb + Object (SVO).
- **Standard vs Non-Standard:**
- There are many varieties of English, with each variety following a slightly different subset of rules by which language operates. A **standard language** is the variety of any given language spoken by the most powerful group in a community. This variety is generally held to be "correct" by prescriptive grammarians. Standard or prestige varieties are usually based on the speech of the rich, powerful, and highly educated members of a society (political elite or upper-class). People are considered standard speakers as long as they do not use any strongly stigmatized forms.
- **Note:** A non-standard language does not mean an ungrammatical language. A sentence can be informal/non-standard and still be grammatical.