



Department of Spanish Studies, General Linguistics and Literature Theory  
University of Alicante

**31710 GENERAL LINGUISTICS I**

Degree in Catalan Studies – Degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies  
Degree in English Studies – Degree in Spanish: Language and Literatures  
Degree in French Studies  
ECTS credits: 6 (150 hours)  
Semester II (Group 4)  
Facilitator: Irma M Muñoz Baell  
Academic year: 2011-2012

## Week 2

### practical sessions

## Workshop – How to study linguistics? Part I

### REQUIRED TEXT

Read the following text carefully (CABTREE, Monica y POWERS, Joyce (comp.) (1991): *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 5th ed.) and answer the reflective log questions as stated below.

#### On terminology

One of the difficult things about confronting a new discipline such as linguistics is that there is new terminology to learn. New terminology is of two sorts. First, there are words which are used only within that particular discipline, such as **quark** in physics or **phoneme** in linguistics. In this case you simply have to learn the meaning and usage of the word, thereby acquiring a new vocabulary item. Somewhat trickier, however, is the second type of new terminology, namely familiar words which have a special technical sense when used in the context of a certain discipline. For example, in ordinary usage, most of us use **velocity** as if it meant exactly the same thing as **speed**; in physics, however, the two are not synonymous in their technical senses.

Throughout this course, you will be encountering many brand-new terms such as **phoneme**, but in addition you will also run into many familiar words which have a somewhat different, more specialized, and technical sense in linguistics. Some of these are listed below with a contrast drawn between the popular sense and the technical sense of the word.

1. **Linguist.** Someone who studies the structure of language and its use, *not* someone who speaks many languages (a person who speaks many languages is a **polyglot**).
2. **Languages.** Systems of signs and constructs used by people as a primary form of communication, *not* specialized vocabulary (e.g., *medical language*) or systems of symbols (e.g., *the language of flowers*).
3. **Dialects.** Varieties of a language used in different geographical and/or social areas (e.g., Southern American English, Cockney English, etc.), *not* foreign languages.
4. **Phonetic.** Of or relating to speech sounds and their representation via special symbols that maintain a one-to-one correspondence with speech sounds, *not* a spelling system that corresponds closely to pronunciation (as when people say *Spanish is a phonetic language*).



5. **Argument.** A reason put forth in support of or against a particular theory or belief, *not* “disagreement” or “quarrel”. *Argument* is also used to refer to the elements of a sentence that combine with other elements to form larger semantic units. For example, the direct object of a verb is one of its *arguments*.
6. **Inflection.** Modification of a word to express grammatical relationship (e.g., the English plural marker –s is an inflectional suffix), *not* modulation of voice or characteristic vocal quality (as when people say *He has a Southern inflection* or *From the change in his inflection we could tell his feelings were hurt*).
7. **Rule.** A formal statement of an observed generalization about patterns in language, *not* the restrictions invented by someone which humans are required to follow in order to avoid unpleasant consequences. (The rules or laws of grammar are comparable to the laws of nature, such as the law of gravity. Isaac Newton didn’t decree that gravity would exist; instead he stated his observation about the attraction of objects toward the earth.).
8. **Grammar.** A system of linguistic elements and rules for their combination and use, *not* the stylistic rules of language use taught in most schools.

The above are just a few examples of common words which have a special sense when used in linguistic discussions. Such words are particularly common in linguistics because language, unlike physics, is something ordinary people frequently discuss. Be on alert for other examples of this type throughout the course. Do not allow the layperson’s definition of a word to interfere with its *technical* use in this course.

### STUDENT’S REFLECTIVE LOG QUESTIONS (RLQ)

These logs express your individual’s response to the previous reading, will serve as a written record of your individual thinking, and will be used as a basis for group discussion. **You are expected to keep all completed reflective log assignments throughout the year for documentation of your own learning process.**

RLQ 1 – Could you match the following definition with its corresponding term in the text above?



*The smallest contrastive segment of speech sound.*  
(Reference: FINCH, Geoffrey (1998): *How to study Linguistics*, London: Macmillan)

RLQ 2 – Grammar is defined in the text above as “a system of linguistic elements and rules for their combination and use, *not* the stylistic rules of language use taught in most schools”. What does **grammar** mean for you? How do you interpret this term?



RLQ 3 – Do you agree with the following definition of the *competence* concept? Why?

A term introduced by CHOMSKY to describe the knowledge possessed by native users of a language which enables them to speak and understand their language fluently. This knowledge is internalised within speakers and not necessarily something they are aware of possessing. All English speakers, for example, will know the rules for forming questions, statements, and commands, but, unless they have studied SYNTAX, will probably be unable to say what they are.

FINCH, Geoffrey (2000): *Linguistic terms and concepts*, Series How to Study. London: Macmillan Press.

What do you usually mean when you say a person is *linguistically competent*?

RLQ 4 – Read the following terms and try to identify how many of them relate to the specific domains of linguistics.

Articulatory phonetics  
Allophone  
Grapheme  
Adjective

Lexeme  
Pragmatics  
Acceptable/unacceptable  
Descriptive/Prescriptive

Competence  
Diachronic  
Syntax