

INTRODUCTION

This Dictionary has been written primarily for undergraduate students and MA students whose curriculum includes a linguistics module, but we hope that undergraduate honours and postgraduate students in general will find it useful. Judging that our intended readers would not find concise and possibly dense definitions of technical terminology particularly helpful, we have gone for more extended explanations. We have included examples wherever possible, adapting the aphorism that one picture is worth many pages. Many of the examples are English, and many of these are real examples from informal English, others are from languages we know or from languages that we know well enough to be able to consult grammars. Some examples come from articles published in journals such as *Language*.

What ground should be covered in a dictionary of linguistics that is limited to 3,000 entries or so? We were guided in our choice by the topics that in our experience are covered in linguistics programmes and courses at British universities, focusing on items typically addressed in introductory textbooks, though not restricted to these. We have kept in mind that in addition to degrees in linguistics, linguistics is also taught as part of a variety of other degrees, and therefore in addition to terms from the central areas of linguistics – syntax, morphology, phonology, phonetics, semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis – we have included terms from stylistics, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, computational linguistics and corpus linguistics. In making our choice of terms, in addition to our own experience we have drawn on the work of our predecessors, especially, Crystal, Trask and Matthews.

Some entries provide etymologies. JM discovered during a four-year stint at Auckland University that the large numbers of Chinese students taking one of his courses were baffled by much of the technical vocabulary. The main problem seemed to be that the terms were not in everyday use in speech or writing and were quite opaque. Etymologies removed the opacity and, for some terms, exposed the metaphor underlying the original use and helped the students to handle the terminology. It turned out that many of the native speakers of English in the class also appreciated the etymologies. We suspect and hope that many of the users of this dictionary will appreciate them too.

We have included a selection of language names, including languages regularly mentioned in linguistics textbooks and ‘major’ languages. As linguists, we recognize that all languages are equal with respect to phonology,

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morphology and syntax. (And the vocabulary of any language can be expanded as required with the creation of native words or the borrowing of words from other languages. To take one area of the vocabulary of English, technical terms in the sciences are all built on roots borrowed from classical Greek and Latin.) In contrast, as members of a particular society and culture in a particular geographical location, we know well that with respect to numbers of speakers, economic power, quantity and quality of written literature and so on, some languages come to the attention of our intended audience more often than others, and we have included them. For many of the languages, we thought it useful to indicate the number of speakers, using data from *Ethnologue* and updating the figures on the basis of information in the *CIA World Factbook*. Such numbers are always approximate, but our goal is to give readers a better idea of the relatively large numbers of speakers that many languages have – and also of the dismayingly few speakers that other languages have.

The choice of technical terms to be defined, of languages to be listed and of appropriate examples requires judgement. The text of the definitions reflects the intended audience. Half of the entries in this dictionary were written by KB and the other half by JM: KB was responsible for entries in phonetics, phonology, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, half the psycholinguistics entries, and ‘general’; JM was responsible for entries in syntax and morphology, semantics and pragmatics, discourse and stylistics, and the other half of the psycholinguistics entries.

We are grateful to generations of students and colleagues, to Helen Barton, our editor at Cambridge University Press, and to a number of specialist reviewers for comments which have materially improved the dictionary and, occasionally, saved us from error – any errors that remain are, of course, ours.

Layout of general entries

The heading is in bold capitals. The body of the entries is in plain font, apart from terms which have their own entry. They are in bold lowercase. Many entries conclude with a list of related entries in bold capitals. These lists will allow users to follow up a particular topic.

Layout of language entries

The entries are mainly in note form. Their structure is

[**Language family**: Number of speakers: Countries where spoken: Additional comments.]

Numbers are abbreviated as in the following examples: 10M = ten million, 500K = five hundred thousand. Where the total of speakers is less than a thousand, the number is expressed in full, e.g. 250, 680.

A

AAC

See **AUGMENTED AND ASSISTED COMMUNICATION**.

AAVE

African American Vernacular English, also known as **Black English Vernacular (BEV)** and **Black English**. A variety used by many African Americans, characterized by being non-rhotic and the frequent deletion of the verb 'to be'.

A-BAR-BINDING

In **Government and Binding Theory, Principles and Parameters** and the **Minimalist Program**, the **binding** between a **pronoun** and an **NP** in a non-**argument** position. In *That guy_i, I'm sure I saw him_i in your office yesterday*, the NP *that guy* is not an argument of *saw*, but *I* and *him* are. There is binding between the pronoun *him* and the non-argument *that guy*, as signalled by the subscript *i*; *him* picks out the same person as *that guy*. See **ANAPHORA, BINDING THEORY, BOUND** .

ABBREVIATION

A conventional short way of writing a word or phrase: *mgs* 'milligrams', *cm* 'centimetre'. Abbreviations are often used in grammatical labels, e.g. *adj(ective)*, *prog(ressive)*. See **ACRONYM, CLIPPING, INITIALISM**.

ABDUCTION

A process of reasoning which does not follow the rules of logic but is widely used, e.g. by children acquiring their native language, and can lead to changes in a given language. The first step is for learners to guess at a rule for some pattern. The rule may be wrong but may yield some correct results. 'Wrong' results may become established as a new stable pattern. To take a real example: a young learner of English apparently devised the rule: verb forms with a change of vowel in the stem are past tense forms. When producing a past tense form, he argued to himself: 'I want to produce a past tense form, and therefore it will have a change of vowel.' This led to the temporary production of verb forms such as *slope* for *slept*. See **DEDUCTION, INDUCTION**.

ABDUCTIVE

Being produced by abduction, such as certain examples of language change.

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ABESSIVE

Case marking signalling absence of a thing or an action. E.g. Finnish *sanaakaan sanoma-tta* 'word-ACC saying-ABESS', 'without/not saying a word'.

A-BINDING

In *Government and Binding Theory, Principles and Parameters* and the *Minimalist Program*, an element in an A (**argument**) position binds an element B if A **c-commands** B and A and B are co-indexed: in *The dog_i injured herself_i*, *The dog* is an argument of *injured* and c-commands *herself*, that is, it A-binds *herself*. See **ANAPHORA**, **ANTECEDENT**.

ABKHAZ

Caucasian. 100K speakers, mainly in the Abkhaz Republic in Georgia.

ABLATIVE

Case marking signalling movement from a place. E.g. Turkish *Ankara* 'Ankara', *Ankara-dan* 'from Ankara'. It may also signal cause – *on-dan* that-from, 'for that reason' – and partitive relations – *kitap-lar-dan biri* book-pl-ABL one 'one of the books'. See **CASE**.

ABLATIVE ABSOLUTE

An **absolute construction** in Latin typically consisting of a **noun** and a **participle**, both in the **ablative** case. The **construction** is subordinate to the rest of the sentence and the two chunks have different **subjects**: e.g., *Caesare interfecto* (Caesar-ABL-sg killed-ABL-sg), *Marcus Antonius ita locutus est* (Mark Antony thus spoken is) 'Caesar having been killed, Mark Antony spoke thus'.

ABLAUT

An alternation in the **vowel** of a **root** or **stem**, e.g. the **inflectional** variation in English 'strong verbs' to mark **past tense**, *sing-sang-sung*, and past participle, *think-thought*, or the derivational variation in English deverbal nouns *sing-song*; *think-thought*. Most frequently used of such variation in older **Indo-European** languages.

ABRUPT RELEASE

In **plosive** consonants, when the **closure** is released it is usually accompanied by **aspiration**, as in [t^hɪk], *tick*. In some environments, as in consonant clusters such as *st-*, the closure is released abruptly, i.e. suddenly, with no aspiration, as in [stɪk], *stick*.

ABSOLUTE

A word or phrase from which an expected **modifier** is missing: *This program runs quicker (than the others)*, *She talks more sensibly (than her brothers)*.

ABSOLUTE ADJECTIVE

An **adjective** denoting a constant property. Colour is a constant property but size is not. Thus, a grey squirrel is a grey animal but a small elephant is not a small animal because different scales of size apply to the set of elephants and the set

of all animals. *Grey* is an absolute adjective and *small* is a relative adjective.
 See **HYPONYMY**, **OPPOSITENESS**.

ABSOLUTE AUDITORY THRESHOLD

In acoustic phonetics the point at which a listener is able distinguish sound.

ABSOLUTE CONSTRUCTION

A phrase subordinate to the rest of a sentence without the relationship being overtly marked: e.g. *The rain having stopped, the children ran outside*. Compare *When/since the rain had stopped, the children ran outside*.

ABSOLUTE FORM

A form of a word with no affixes; e.g. Turkish *ev* 'house' vs *ev-e* 'house-DAT to the house' and *ev-i* 'house-3POSS his/her house'.

ABSOLUTE TENSE

See **RELATIVE TENSE**.

ABSOLUTE-RELATIVE TENSE

See **RELATIVE TENSE**.

ABSOLUTE UNIVERSAL

A property found in every human language; e.g. having **vowels** and **consonants**, marking **reference** and **predication**. See **PREDICATE (2)**, **REFERENCE**.

ABSOLUTIVE

In **ergative** languages, the case form for the **subject** of an **intransitive verb** and the **object** of a transitive verb. See **CASE**, **TRANSITIVITY**.

ABSORPTION

In phonology, the process whereby one element is incorporated into another. Particularly in **tone languages** where, for example, if a high-low contour precedes a low tone giving the sequence, HL+L, one low might be absorbed into the other to yield H L. See **CONTOUR**, **SPREADING**.

ABSTRACT NOUN

A noun denoting a state or property which cannot be seen, touched, etc; *truth*, *courage*, *guilt*. See **CONCRETE NOUN**.

ABSTRACT SEGMENT

Some theories of phonology propose an abstract underlying segment which does not correlate directly with any single surface representation to account for some particular phonological feature; for example the feature [syllabic] may be used to identify segments that can serve as syllable nucleus, i.e. vowels, nasals, etc.

ABSTRACT STRUCTURE

A representation differing from **surface structure** but showing, for example, grammatical relations and other relations that are not immediately apparent in the surface. For instance, a **discontinuous construction** like the 'past progressive'

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was jumping might be given an abstract representation as {past}+ {BE+-ing} + {JUMP}, where the discontinuous constituents are brought together – {BE+ing} represents the progressive. This corresponds to a less abstract reordered representation as {BE+past} {JUMP+-ing}. See **SURFACE STRUCTURE**.

ACCENT

1. A speech variety differing in its pronunciation from other varieties. The variation may be due to regional factors, (a London, Geordie, Somerset, etc. accent), social factors (an RP accent), whether a speaker is a native speaker or not (a French, Chinese, etc. accent). Varieties differing grammatically are usually referred to as **dialects**. Accent and dialect typically go together, but need not do so. 2. In variation studies. Those features of a person's pronunciation that identify regional or social origin. Dialect studies are also concerned with grammatical and lexical features. Regional accents can be characteristic of urban (e.g. Liverpool) or rural (e.g. Norfolk) communities. The term is also often applied to the pronunciation of speakers of 'foreign' languages (e.g. a Russian accent). Social accents relate to the social, cultural or educational circumstances of a speaker. In Britain received pronunciation, RP, is the name of an accent with no regional affiliation traditionally associated with the 'Queen's English', a public school education, the professions, the court, BBC newsreaders, etc. 3. Auditory prominence within a word or syllable, also referred to as stress. Thus in *com'puter* the second, stressed, syllable, *-pu-* is perceived as more prominent than its neighbours. Differences in accent may mark different word meanings, e.g. '*protest*: *pro'test*'. The auditory weight may derive from a variety of factors, raised pitch, additional volume, additional length. etc. 4. In metrics. Accent, or stress, is partially responsible for the rhythm of metrical verse as in *To'be or'not to 'be*, '*that is the 'question*. 5. Diacritic marks that indicate pronunciation, etc., e.g. the acute accent: á; the grave accent à.

ACCEPTABILITY

A property of words, phrases, clauses and sentences. A given example may be judged by native speakers to be more or less acceptable; that is, to correspond more or less to normal usage. In linguistics, examples are graded according to whether they are judged to be marginally possible (?), marginally impossible (*), totally impossible (**) and so on. (Judgements are indicated by question marks and asterisks as in the preceding sentence.) Speakers make their judgements on various grounds, and different speakers may judge examples differently. A distinction is generally drawn between acceptable and grammatical. An example may be constructed according to the rules of a given language but be unacceptable, say because it is too long or too complex, like *I know that she knows that the manager is aware that the teller suspected that something was wrong*. Examples may be grammatical but unacceptable because they are impolite or scatological. In contrast, an example such as *We drank wine expensive* is unacceptable because the grammar of English requires adjectives to precede nouns in such constructions: *We drank expensive wine*. An example such as *She likes is*

ungrammatical and hence unacceptable because it is incomplete. *Likes* requires a direct object, as in *She likes cats*. In contrast, ungrammatical sentences may be acceptable as catchphrases such as, from a television programme, *Nice to see you – to see you nice*.

ACCESSIBILITY

See ACCESSIBILITY HIERARCHY.

ACCESSIBILITY HIERARCHY

1. A scale of grammatical functions or relations in which **subject** (NP) is the most accessible to **modification** by **relative clauses**, followed by **direct object**, **indirect object** and **oblique** object in declining order of accessibility. For a given language, if less accessible NPs can be modified by a relative clause (or relativized), all the more accessible NPs can be relativized. All languages relativize subject NPs: in *The boy was playing with the hammer*, *The boy* is the subject and can be replaced by *who* to give the relative clause *who was playing with the hammer*. There are languages that do not allow oblique object NPs to be relativized: *the hammer with which the boy was playing* is possible in English but not in many **Bantu** languages. 2. A scale of NP types graded according to how easily the listener (in the speaker's judgement) can pick up their **referents**. Highly accessible referents may require no overt NP or just a pronoun: *(I) hope you will manage to visit us* (in a letter or e-mail); inaccessible referents require a full NP: *I have contacted a firm in Sheffield that makes the equipment*. In declining order of accessibility a hierarchy proposed for English is zero anaphora, agreement, stressed independent pronoun, right dislocated definite NP, neutral ordered definite NP, left dislocated definite NP, cleft, indefinite NP. See ANAPHORA, CLEFT CONSTRUCTION, DEIXIS, LEFT DISLOCATION, NOUN PHRASE, RIGHT DISLOCATION.

ACCIDENCE

An older term for **inflectional morphology**.

ACCIDENTAL GAP

A phonologically well-formed sequence that happens not to represent a real word, e.g. *blick*, *brillig*. See SYSTEMATIC GAP.

ACCOMMODATION

Adjustments in **accent**, etc. made by a speaker to resemble their interlocutor more closely, thus reducing social distance.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

Accomplishments are situations consisting of an **activity** phase and an **achievement**. Writing an e-mail involves the activity of writing, and the event is brought to completion (reaches its final bound or boundary) with the writing of the last word. Driving to a destination involves the activity phase of driving along a road and the achievement phase of arriving at the destination.

See AKTIONSART.

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ACCUSATIVE

In **nominative-accusative languages** a case marking for **direct object** or **patient nouns** See **CASE**.

ACCUSATIVE AND INFINITIVE

A **construction** borrowed from **Latin**. Verbs of judging, such as *consider*, *judge*, *believe*, *think*, can be followed by a complement clause, as in *They believed that she had won* or *I judge that he is the most competent*, or by a direct object and infinitive, as in *They believed her to have won* and *I judge him to be the most competent*. In Latin direct object nouns are in the accusative case and the English pronouns have different subject and object forms, e.g. *she* vs *her*, *he* vs *him*.

ACHIEVEMENT

Achievements are situations conceived as happening instantaneously. Achievement verbs in English are *recognize*, *reach*, *see* (in the sense 'catch sight of'), *catch*. They are the verbs that typically occur in achievement clauses, combining with time phrases such as *in five seconds*, but not *for five seconds*, but rarely occurring in the Progressive – ?*I was recognizing my old teacher*. See **ACTIVITY**, **ACCOMPLISHMENT**, **AKTIONSART**.

ACOUSTIC

Related to the physical properties of sound. See **ACOUSTIC CUE**, **ACOUSTIC DISTINCTIVE FEATURE**, **ACOUSTIC PHONETICS**.

ACOUSTIC CUE

An **acoustic** characteristic of a speech sound used in its recognition.

ACOUSTIC DISTINCTIVE FEATURE

A property of a speech sound when analysed by acoustic phonetic techniques, as opposed to an auditory or articulatory feature. For example, **fundamental frequency**. In some versions of distinctive feature theory, acoustic features define the binary oppositions that characterize a phonological system. See **DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**, **ACOUSTIC**; **J&H DISTINCTIVE FEATURE THEORY**, **SPE DISTINCTIVE FEATURE THEORY**.

ACOUSTIC PHONETICS

The branch of phonetics that deals with the physical properties of speech sounds. It relies on electronic instrumentation and, increasingly, on computational analysis. Acoustic analysis can be used to support articulatory or auditory analysis. Sometimes, particularly in the analysis of intonation, acoustic, instrumental and auditory analyses can appear to be in conflict.

ACROLECT

In a **dialect continuum**, the variety (or **lect**) that is most prestigious. In the Jamaican **post creole continuum**, the acrolect is standard English and the **basilect** is Jamaican creole. See **MESOLECT**.

ACRONYM

A word formed from the initial letters of two or more words, e.g. *PIN* 'personal identification number'. Like *PIN*, many acronyms can be pronounced as a word. Others, such as *EU* 'European Union', have to be spelled out. See **INITIALISM**.

'ACROSS-THE-BOARD'

Of a process that applies to all the members of a linguistic system; e.g. a sound change affecting all intervocalic voiceless **stops** or affecting all the members of some coordinate structure: *the books I bought and actually read and enjoyed* can be thought of as derived from *the books [I bought the books and I actually read the books and I enjoyed the books]*. A process called object deletion applies across the board to delete all the instances of the direct object *the books* inside the square brackets. See **INTERVOCALIC, VOICELESS**.

ACROSTIC

A text, usually a poem, in which particular letters, such as the first letter in each line, make up a word.

ACTANT

French term for the phrases in a clause referring to the **participants** in the process denoted by the clause. See **ROLE**.

ACTION

A dynamic situation involving change, expenditure of energy and an agent: e.g. *The children are playing cricket, John is building a terrace*. See **AKTIONSART, PROCESS, STATE**.

ACTION NOUN

Noun formed from a verb and denoting an action or process: *dig – digging, transmit (a broadcast) – transmission of a broadcast*.

ACTION VERB

See **AKTIONSART, DYNAMIC**.

ACTIVE

1. See **VOICE**. 2. Vocabulary which a speaker uses as opposed to passive vocabulary which a speaker recognizes but does not use.

ACTIVE ARTICULATOR

The description of the place of articulation of a consonant identifies the place of contact or constriction between a moveable articulator, the active articulator, usually the tongue, and an immobile articulator, the passive articulator, usually the roof of the mouth.

ACTIVITY

Activities are situations presented as having duration and lacking an end-point. Verbs in activity clauses combine with time phrases such as *for hours, for two weeks* and allow the Progressive. *The children were running round the pond* is an Activity;

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The children were running to the pond is an **Accomplishment**, since the event concludes when the children reach the end point, the pond. See **ACHIEVEMENT**, **AKTIONSSART**.

ACTOR

Especially in **Role and Reference Grammar**, a macro-role covering different microroles. E.g. on one analysis, in *The water flowed out of the dam*, *water* is a **theme** and in *The engineers drained the dam*, *engineers* is an **agent**; but both *water* and *engineers* are actors. See **LOGICAL SUBJECT, ROLE, UNDERGOER**.

ACTOR-ACTION-GOAL

The basic construction type in declarative clauses. More common labels nowadays are **agent** for 'actor' and **patient** for 'goal'. See **CONSTRUCTION**.

ACTUAL WORD

A word that has been attested in the use of some community of speakers or writers. *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* is not an actual word, although many people have heard it in the film *Mary Poppins*. *Tifting* is not known to many users of this dictionary, but it is an actual word used by the community of architects specializing in Scottish architecture.

ACTUALIZATION

1. In syntax and morphology. See **REALIZATION**. 2. Especially in literary texts, the creation by an author of a text establishing a believable world of characters, settings and events and the activity of readers in interpreting the text using the author's clues.

ACUTE

1. An acoustic distinctive feature involving a concentration of energy in the upper frequencies of the spectrum, associated with a front or medial articulation, i.e. front vowels and consonants with a non-peripheral articulation, dental, alveolar, palatal. Opposite **grave**. See **J&H DISTINCTIVE FEATURE THEORY**.
 2. In J&H Distinctive Feature Theory, an acoustic **distinctive feature** involving a concentration of energy in the upper frequencies of the spectrum, associated with front vowels and consonants with a non-peripheral articulation, e.g. dental, alveolar, palatal. Opposite **grave**. See **DISTINCTIVE FEATURES, ACOUSTIC**. 3. The accent mark *˘* as in *café*.

ADDRESSEE

One of the roles played in turn by the participants in a **dialogue**, that of the person being spoken to. See **SPEAKER**.

ADEQUACY

1. In *Aspects of the theory of syntax*, Chomsky proposed a set of levels of adequacy for evaluating grammars. A grammar was said to be observationally adequate if it generated all the sentences of a language, that is, all the sequences of words. A grammar was descriptively adequate if it assigned correct (**constituent structure**) to the sentences. A theory of grammar (or a grammar of a language)