

How Languages Work

Language is a highly sophisticated tool we use to communicate with one another in a multitude of different ways.

This new introduction to linguistics presents language in all its amazing complexity, while guiding students systematically through the basics. Students emerge with an appreciation of the diversity of the world's languages, as well as a deeper understanding of the structure of human language, the ways it is used, and its broader social and cultural context.

Chapters devoted to the nuts and bolts of language study – from speech sounds to sound patterns, from sentence structure to meaning – are combined with chapters introducing students to the “functional” aspects of language, such as discourse, prosody, pragmatics, and language contact, helping them gain a better grasp of how language works as speakers use it in daily interaction.

A rich set of Language Profiles helps students explore the world's linguistic diversity and identify similarities and differences between languages, while encouraging them to apply concepts from earlier chapter material. A range of carefully designed pedagogical features fosters student engagement by adopting a step-by-step approach along with study questions and case studies.

Well-chosen illustrations support students in developing their analytical skills; the extensive online material includes multimedia resources for students and instructors.



How Languages Work

An Introduction to Language and Linguistics

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PREFACE

How Languages Work is designed to be the primary text for a university-level introductory course in linguistics. The audience for the book includes:

- undergraduates taking an introductory linguistics course as a general education requirement;
- beginning linguistics students with limited background in the field;
- linguistics graduate students seeking a helpful reference and introductory discussions of a wide range of sub-disciplines and a range of languages;
- students in related disciplines (such as education, anthropology, writing, or communication) that seek grounding in linguistics; and
- general readers with an avid love of languages.

In addition to courses offered within departments of linguistics, the book might be used in departments of anthropology, education, psychology, communication, applied linguistics, English, or other languages. It introduces the field of linguistics through its subfields, and prepares students for more advanced and specialized coursework.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been the work of many hands over many years. My sincere thanks go out to the contributing authors, whose combined experience in linguistics can be counted in centuries and whose deep insights into language enrich every page of this book. They have been extraordinarily patient with me as I've pursued this project simultaneously with many others and have graciously accepted deeper editing than they are typically accustomed to as I've strived to bring unity and a consistent voice to these pages. I have greatly appreciated their wisdom, patience, good humor, and sheer hard work.

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I dedicate this book to the memory of my parents.

CAROL GENETTI
Santa Barbara

LIST OF GLOSSING CONVENTIONS

Convention	Meaning
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
A	agentive argument of transitive verb
ABL	ablative
ABS	absolute
ACC	accusative
AD	adessive (“onward”)
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverbial
ADV.DS	adverbial, different subjects
ADV.SS	adverbial, same subjects
AFFIRM	affirmed evidential knowledge
AGT	agentive
ALL	allative
ALREADY	already
ANT	anterior
APPL	applicative
APUD	next-to locative
ASP	aspect marker
ASSOC	associative plural
AUX	auxiliary
AV	active voice
AWAY.FROM.RIVER	directional affix
BRIEF	brief duration
CAUS	causative
CLF	classifier

CLT	clitic
COM	comitative
COMPAR	comparative
COMPL	completive
COND	conditional
CONJ	conjunctive
CONJECTURE	evidential
CONS	mutual consent
CONT	continuous
COP	copula
DAT	dative
DECL	declarative
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative
DESIDERATIVE	desiderative
DET	determiner
DIM	diminutive
DIST	distal
DISTR	distributive
DM	discourse marker
DS	different subject
DU	dual
DUPLICATIVE	duplicative
DUR	durative
EMPH	emphatic
ERG	ergative
ESS	essive
EVEN	additive
EVENT	event
EVID	evidential
F	feminine
FACTUAL	factual
FOC	focus
FUT	future
FUT1>2	future tense for first-person subject with a second-person object
GEN	genitive
HABITUAL	habitual
HON	honorific
I/II/III/IV	gender classes

IE	informal ending
ILL	illative
IMP	imperative
IMPRS	impersonal
INC	inceptive
INCL	inclusive
IND	indicative
INDF	indefinite
INE	inessive
INF	infinitive
INST	instrumental
INTENSIFIER	intensifier
INTR	intrasnsitive
IO	indirect object
IPFV	imperfective
IRR	irrealis
ITR	iterative
JUST	delimitative
LAT	lative
LINKER	linking morpheme
LOC	locative
M	masculine
MANIP	manipulative
MIDDLE	middle voice
MUTUAL	evidential
N-	non-
NEAR.FUT	near future
NEG	negative, negation
NMLZ	nominalizer
NOM	nominative
NUM.CLF	numeral classifier
OBJ	objective
OBL	oblique
OBLIGATE	obligation
P/O	patientive argument of transitive verb
PASS	passive
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
POSSEE	possee

PREP	preposition
PRF	perfect
PROG	progressive
PROX	proximal
PRS	present
PRT	partitive
PST	past
PST.PTCP	past participle
PTC	particle
PTCP	participle
PURP	purposive
Q	question marker
QUOT	quotative
REC.PST	recent (past)
REM.PST	remote (past)
REP	repetitive
REPORT	non-personal knowledge
S	intransitive subject
SBJ	subject
SEMBL	semblative
SEQ	sequential
SG	singular
SPEC	specific-indefinite article
SS	same subject marking
STAT	stative
SUB	below locative
SUPER	above locative
TO	directional affix
TOP	topic
TR	transitive
UNW	unwitnessed
UP	up(stream) directional
VERBAL.ADJ	verbal adjective
WIT	witnessed
YET	yet

THE BOOK'S APPROACH

This textbook has a distinct theoretical perspective, which has come to be known as “functional,” a term that is typically contrasted with approaches labeled “formal” (a contrastive discussion of these two theoretical approaches can be found in Chapters 6 and 14). The central premise of the functional approach is that language is most deeply understood by reference to its function as a tool for the myriad purposes of human communication, which occurs through the medium of discourse. Language is thus shaped by discourse as it is produced in the service of communicative interaction. Since language is a quintessentially human activity, languages are grounded in human physiology and cognition, and are both reflective and creative of human societies and cultures. In addition, languages persist over time and are dynamic and constantly changing. Explaining language – why languages have the structures and properties that they do – requires us to understand this broader context.

Because this book does not present linguistics from a formal perspective, it is an appropriate choice for faculty members who wish to provide their students with an excellent orientation to language and linguistics, but are not interested in the abstract formal models of Generative and related theoretical paradigms, or for those with disciplinary grounding beyond linguistics. However, it is important to emphasize that this book is highly technical and analytical, and requires exacting attention to structural detail. Grammar is presented in significant depth and the material is rigorous and may at times be challenging. However, a major focus of the text is to provide students with explicit direction that will help them acquire analytical skills. In addition, the associated website includes numerous learning aids (such as interactive tutorials) that support this process. The password-protected instructor materials on the website include suggestions for sections to assign (and not assign) for classes with a less technical emphasis.

Importantly, this book is strongly cross-linguistic in its orientation; the focus is not just on *language* but also on *languages*. In exposing readers to languages from across the globe, it serves as an introduction to the world's linguistic diversity. Cross-linguistic comparisons are important not only because they allow us to classify languages, but

also because they reveal what a language is or might be. Understanding the similarities and differences between languages is essential to the development of empirically justifiable theories about language, particularly with regards to the relationship between linguistic structures and the communicative needs of their speakers.

In addition, linguistic variety is simply fascinating and fun; it reveals much about humankind, and the thousands of ways that particular communities of speakers have categorized and represented the world around them. For that reason, this book contains a special feature: a set of **Language Profiles**, each written by a linguist who has conducted extensive fieldwork in the community that they write about (with the exception of Guy Deutscher, whose profile is on the long-extinct language Akkadian, which is attested on excavated clay tablets). After a brief introduction to the language and the community in which it is spoken, each language profile provides an overview of the basic structures and then goes into depth on one or more topics that tie in with the primary chapters. The languages were selected so as to represent languages of diverse locations, families, and types. Together, these thirteen short studies serve not only to reinforce and illustrate the main points of the primary chapters, but also to expose the reader to the world’s linguistic diversity.

The book’s structure

The book contains fifteen primary chapters and thirteen language profiles. It can fit into academic programs in a number of ways. It provides more than sufficient material for a semester-long introductory course. It can also be used in a shorter academic quarter, with instructors selecting the topics they deem the most crucial for students within their programs. It can also be used across multiple courses; for example, the language profiles can be used in subsequent courses on linguistic analysis, morphosyntax, or languages of the world. Chapters not covered in an introductory course can serve as initial readings in more specialized topic-specific courses (such as one on language acquisition). The material could also be expanded to a two-quarter or year-long course, although in the latter case some supplementary readings would probably be desirable. Further discussion on different ways to structure courses and how to incorporate the language profiles are available on the instructor’s portion of the website.

The chapters in this book follow the traditional format of tracing linguistic structure, beginning with the smallest units (sounds), building up to successively larger units, and ending with discourse. Chapters on orthogonal topics – such as semantics, language change, and language acquisition – follow the structural chapters. Because of the functionalist orientation of the book, chapters are included on a variety of topics that are not typically found in introductory textbooks. These include prosody, discourse, pragmatics, and language contact.

The functionalist perspective and broad coverage of this book allow it to fill a niche in the market that is currently not covered by other texts. The contributing authors are practicing linguists and distinguished leaders in their given fields. The editor and each

author, while not losing their individual voice, maintain a consistent chapter structure and level throughout, to ensure a smooth reading experience for the student. The text is contemporary and up to date. Most importantly, it presents language in the full richness of its context, as a complex dynamic tool shaped by generations of speakers through discourse interactions, adaptive to the broader social and cultural context in which it is embedded. Readers will develop a deep appreciation of the beauty, complexity, and sheer genius of language, and of humankind to whom it belongs.



www.cambridge.org/genetti

The website materials are important companions to the book. The website contains a range of materials that will help instructors teach the course and help students engage with and master the skills of linguistic analysis.

Resources for students include:

- sound files associated with particular examples in the text;
- interactive tutorials on problem solving;
- online flashcards;
- “how-to” guides that take students through steps of linguistic analysis;
- explicit instruction in writing for linguistics;
- study guides;
- self-administered online quizzes on vocabulary and key concepts;
- enriched material about the profiled languages, including interesting cultural information and profiles of speakers.

Resources for instructors include:

- PowerPoint slides for each chapter;
- additional problems and suggested exam questions;
- sample assignments;
- answer keys;
- suggestions on how to structure courses, depending on class goals;
- guide to the language profiles and suggestions on how to incorporate them into classes.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Linguistics is a highly diverse and interdisciplinary field, taking you from concrete details of physical acoustics to abstract logical argument, from concise grammatical structure to rich observations on culture and society. There are few people for whom all of it comes easily – everyone has their favorite subfields – but it is all essential as every subfield deeply interacts with all others. This book has been designed with the student in mind and has many features to facilitate acquisition of the skills necessary to fully appreciate the complexity of language. What follows is some advice for making the most of these features.

It is important in linguistics to engage with the text. Linguistics is not a field where you read quickly and lightly. It is better not to plan to cover too much at one time and not to hurry through it; take adequate time to fully work through a couple of sections, and then take a break. Throughout the primary chapters, you will find that **key points have been put in bold italics**. Of course, there are many other important points that you will want to note as well. Textboxes contain case studies and important related side points and should also be read. Be sure to really think about the discussion and make it your own; take time to reflect on your own lifelong experience of language and connect it to what you are learning, and to become conscious of language use as you are immersed in it daily. This practice will take your understanding to an entirely new level.

You will find that the pages are filled with examples taken from languages throughout the world. Most of these are numbered and set off from the text. It is critical that you spend time looking at these in detail, even if you are tempted to skip over them to continue with the main text. They are as important as the text itself: each informs the other and neither can be fully understood in isolation. (See Sidebar 0.1.) You will find that much of the time words from other languages are broken into their component parts and translations of the meaning of each part are provided. Often these translations are abbreviated and put in small caps, for example, SG for singular. Many of these glossing conventions are noted in the sidebars. In addition, each chapter has a list of the glossing conventions used within it positioned just before the exercises. A full list of all glossing conventions can also be found on pages xviii–xxi.



SIDEBAR 0.1

Sidebars, such as this one, are helpful in providing important information about the examples and in suggesting ways for you to further engage with the material.

Linguistics has extensive terminology that must be learned to understand the field successfully. The Glossary in the back of the book provides simple definitions and is an important reference tool. All words in the Glossary are presented in **bold** at first mention (as well as later in the book if they haven't been mentioned for a while, as a reminder that a glossary entry is available). Also, each primary chapter has online flashcards to help you memorize terms.


One of the essential features of this book is its focus on linguistic analysis. This is the process by which you take a linguistic expression (a word, a sentence, a stretch of discourse) and figure out all of its parts and subparts and how it contributes to the whole. This fine-grained analysis then leads us to a broader understanding of how languages work, the underlying principles, and how the design of languages both serves and reflects their functions as tools of human communicative interaction.

There are many methods of linguistic analysis, depending on which aspects of language are being studied. For example, determining which aspects of phonetic articulation are meaningful in a language is a very different (though surprisingly not unrelated) exercise from determining whether two languages are members of the same language family, or whether a language differentiates active voice from passive voice. Learning how to apply these methods is central to learning linguistics. In order to make this as easy as possible, methodologies are presented in step-by-step fashion. Sidebars prompt you to apply the methods to further data sets. Each chapter has a set of exercises that allows you to analyze new data. In addition, there are many resources on the *How Languages Work* website that serve as aids for improving your analytical skills. These include interactive tutorials, step-by-step instructions, guides to writing in linguistics, etc.

Another important component of the website is the addition of sound files. By far the majority of instances of language use are spoken, and sound is an integral part of most languages (signed languages being the exception). Throughout this book (and all others) you will see speech sounds represented by letters and other two-dimensional symbols, but keep in mind that these are only *representations* of sounds, not sounds themselves. In moving to the abstraction of representation, considerable richness is lost. To partially address this, especially for those chapters that focus on sound (phonetics, phonology, and prosody), many of the examples are accompanied by sound files accessible on the *How Languages Work* website (see Sidebar 0.2). Take the time to listen to them carefully. Most of the language profiles also have sound files, typically of recorded texts. These provide a tangible sense of the language and its speakers that cannot be otherwise replicated.



SIDEBAR 0.2

When sound files are available on the website, they are noted in the sidebars with an icon like this: 

One of the most fascinating aspects of studying linguistics is learning about the tremendous variety – and ingenuity – of human languages. Linguistic diversity is both captivating and fun. Languages are inseparable from the people who speak them,

and they both embody and reflect the world’s cultures and societies. In addition, understanding linguistic diversity is critical to understanding the broader principles that underlie languages, i.e., how languages work, and what languages do. The primary chapters in the book are replete with examples taken from languages across the globe.

In addition, the book contains thirteen language profiles, case studies in shorter chapters that focus on particular languages, written by linguists who have dedicated much of their professional lives to studying and analyzing those languages. These case studies all begin with a brief overview of the language, its situation, and the communities that speak it. They then go on to discuss one or more particular aspects of the language in depth, tying in and reinforcing the concepts and analytical skills of the main chapters. Depending on the length of the class, instructors may or may not require these as reading. If not, they are excellent supplements to the main chapters. As a whole, the set of language profiles will serve to vastly advance one’s understanding of linguistics. Not only do they allow the widespread application of linguistic concepts to many different languages, they also illustrate the diversity of language types, especially as regards their grammatical structures. Textbox 0.1 provides a list of the language profiles in relation to the chapters to which they correspond; it is best to read the relevant chapter first.

TEXTBOX 0.1 **WHEN TO READ WHICH LANGUAGE PROFILES**

After Chapter:	Read:
3	Kabardian
6	Goemai, Manange, Nuuchahnulth, Finnish, Quechua, Bardi, Tsez
7	Chontal
11	Indonesian
12	Seneca, Akkadian
13	Manambu

My own experience with linguistics is that the farther I climb, the greater the vistas I behold. I hope that students will find their own vistas by exploring the field far beyond this book. To encourage this, every chapter and language profile contains a list of suggested reading with a brief note about each entry; these can provide the next steps toward a deeper understanding of this quintessential aspect of our humanity.

