

Thinking like a Linguist

This is an engaging introduction to the study of language for undergraduate or beginning graduate students, aimed especially at those who would like to continue further linguistic study. It introduces students to analytical thinking about language but goes beyond existing texts to show what it means to think like a scientist about language, through the exploration of data and interactive problem sets. A key feature of this text is its flexibility. With its focus on foundational areas of linguistics and scientific analysis, it can be used in a variety of course types, with instructors using it alongside other information or texts as appropriate for their own courses of study. The text can also serve as a supplementary text in other related fields (speech and hearing sciences, psychology, education, computer science, anthropology, and others) to help learners in these areas better understand how linguists think about and work with language data. No prerequisites are necessary. While each chapter often references content from the others, the three central chapters, on sound, structure, and meaning, may be used in any order.

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-18392-6 — Thinking like a Linguist
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An Introduction to the Science
of Language

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[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107183926
DOI: 10.1017/9781316874967

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First published 2021

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow, Cornwall, 2021

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-107-18392-6 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-316-63520-9 Paperback

Additional resources for this title at www.cambridge.org/sandoval-denham

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Cambridge University Press
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Preface

Thinking like a Linguist grows out of the teaching of a course called Linguistic Analysis we offer for linguistics majors and minors that guides them to think analytically using linguistic data. It introduces students to analytical thinking about language, as any introductory text does, but goes beyond existing texts to show what it means to think like a scientist about language through the exploration of data and interactive problem sets.

The development of this text has come from our own and others' desire for a text that better matches what we try to accomplish in a course that is committed to helping students understand what it means to be a linguist and to practice the skills, understand the approaches, and gain the fundamental knowledge that allows them to pursue further study in the field. Unlike many introductory courses and texts that try not only to introduce students to the core components of the field but also to see how they interact with other related disciplines, topics, and careers, this text is more narrowly focused on the scientific methodology needed in order to *do* linguistics.

The book offers foundational knowledge of linguistics. The traditional areas of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are combined into three central chapters on sound, structure, and meaning. The focus is on problem-solving, conducting analysis, and employing scientific methodology, as well as learning just enough terminology and metalanguage for access to further study and a shared vocabulary. This organization allows us to make the approach less English-centric than that of many other texts, since the traditional separation between the central areas of study is typically informed by Indo-European language study, and to home in on the phenomena rather than simply adopting the typical steps of description and explanation found in many introductory texts.

The book is intended to be an introduction to linguistics for the undergraduate or beginning graduate student, and it is especially targeted at those students who would like to continue further linguistic study. The flexibility of the text is a key feature. Because it is focused on foundational areas of linguistics and scientific analysis, it may be used in a variety of types of courses, with instructors supplementing other information or texts as appropriate for their own courses of study. This text can also serve as a supplementary text in other related fields (speech and hearing sciences, psychology, education, computer science, anthropology, and others) to teach students in these disciplines to better understand how linguists think about and work with language data. No prerequisites are necessary. While

each chapter often references content from the others, the three central chapters on sound, structure, and meaning can be used in any order.

There are ample opportunities for students to engage in the kind of problem-solving that we want them to be able to do. Students will not only fully explore the methodology of linguistic problem-solving but also gain a real understanding of and appreciation for a critical approach to language study. Many other texts make use of the methodology and expect students to use a scientific approach but do not detail how students should go about that, nor allow them ample opportunity to practice the methodology. This feature is unique to our text and is highlighted through the use of intertextual problems and exercises.

The book’s unique exercise integration includes three types, called Practice (with pointers in the text → to the appropriate practice exercise at the end of the chapter), Discover, and Consider. Practice questions allow students to practice using tools such as phonetic transcription, breaking words into morphemes, identifying lexical or phrasal categories, identifying semantic features, or labeling maxims of conversation. These are at the end of each chapter, but indicators (with an →) suggest where the reader should pause reading and practice doing. In addition to the Let’s Practice exercises at the end of the chapter, there are More to Discover and More to Consider exercises. The Discover exercises guide students to do just that – to discover linguistic patterns of sound, structure, or meaning. Some of these ask students to “conduct some research” or “go online to find out about.” Such research should be done thoughtfully, with attention to where the information is coming from. Where possible, students should use peer-reviewed sources. An abbreviated list of some good online resources includes *The Linguist List*, *Language Log*, *Speech Accent Archive*, and *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. The Consider exercises prompt students to delve into open questions. These, too, are included within the text of each chapter, and additional ones are found at the end of each chapter. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 each contain three Spotlight boxes focused on psycholinguistics, on sociolinguistics, and on historical linguistics, connecting material from each chapter to these important related areas of linguistics study.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we thank our students, past and present. Their questions, their comments, their intuitions, their energy, and their enthusiasm make us better teachers and better scholars.

We thank our colleagues for providing helpful feedback on earlier versions of the manuscript and for all their support; it’s really wonderful to be in such a supportive community of linguists.

We are grateful to be at Western Washington University, where the relationship between good teaching and good scholarship is recognized and where scholarly teaching is celebrated.

We look forward to your feedback, readers!