

## How Languages Work

### An Introduction to Language and Linguistics

Language is a sophisticated tool which we use to communicate in a multitude of ways.

Updated and expanded in its second edition, this book introduces language and linguistics – presenting language in all its amazing complexity while systematically guiding you through the basics. You will 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.

Part I is devoted to the nuts and bolts of language study – speech sounds, sound patterns, sentence structure and meaning – and includes chapters dedicated to the functional aspects of language: discourse, prosody, pragmatics, and language contact. The fourteen language profiles included in Part II reveal the world’s linguistic variety while expanding on the similarities and differences between languages. Using knowledge gained from Part I, you will explore how language functions when speakers use it in daily interaction.

With a step-by-step approach that is reinforced with well-chosen illustrations, case studies, and study questions you will gain understanding and analytical skills that will only enrich your ongoing study of language and linguistics.

Carol Genetti is a Professor of Linguistics and the Anne and Michael Towbes Graduate Dean at University of California, Santa Barbara.



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## An Introduction to Language and Linguistics

Editor

**CAROL GENETTI**

*University of California, Santa Barbara*

Assistant Editor

**ALLISON ADELMAN**

*Antioch University Santa Barbara*

### Contributors

- Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald** *James Cook University*  
**Ayla Applebaum** *University of California, Santa Barbara*  
**Mira Ariel** *Tel Aviv University*  
**Claire Bowers** *Yale University*  
**Mary Bucholtz** *University of California, Santa Barbara*  
**Wallace Chafe** *University of California, Santa Barbara*  
**Dorothy Chun** *University of California, Santa Barbara*  
**Patricia M. Clancy** *University of California, Santa Barbara*  
**Bernard Comrie** *University of California, Santa Barbara*  
**Guy Deutscher** *Independent Scholar*  
**Robert Englebretson** *Rice University*  
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**Lal Zimman** *University of California, Santa Barbara*



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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 UC Santa Barbara Linguistics graduate students: past, present, and future.

CAROL GENETTI  
*Santa Barbara*



## GLOSSING CONVENTIONS

<b>Convention</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
A	agentive argument of transitive verb
ABL	ablative
ABS	absolutive
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
DLOC	dislocative
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

**List of Glossing Conventions**

INCL	inclusive
IND	indicative
INDF	indefinite
INE	inessive
INF	infinitive
INST	instrumental
INTENSIFIER	intensifier
INTR	intransitive
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
NF	non-Feminine
NMLZ	nominalizer
NOM	nominative
NP	noun phrase
NPST	non past tense
NSG	non singular
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	possessee
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)
REDUP	reduplication
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 explores how languages work: the “pieces” of languages and the principles governing their nature and how they fit together; the ways in which language conveys meaning; how humans use language as the substance of everyday interaction; the role of language in society and culture; how languages adapt and change over time; and how they are learned by children and adults. It presents language as a quintessentially human activity, showing how languages are grounded in human physiology and cognition, and are both reflective and creative of human societies and cultures. It emphasizes the dynamic and constantly changing nature of language. Teaching students this broader context allows them to understand the forces that shape language, hence to gain a deeper understanding of linguistic principles and structures.

The book does not introduce any particular “formalist” theoretical paradigm (such as Generative Grammar) but describes grammatical structures from the perspective of linguistic typology. It thus follows a broad international consensus on the nature of linguistic categories and structures. It is an appropriate choice for faculty members who wish to provide their students with a rigorous orientation to language and linguistics without introducing formal models. This book is highly technical and analytical, and requires exacting attention to structural detail. Grammar is presented in significant depth and the material 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. 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 profiled languages were selected to represent languages of diverse locations, families, and types. Together, these fourteen 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 fourteen language profiles. These can be fit into academic programs in a number of ways. The book 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 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 may 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. Several 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 theoretical 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.

## Changes to the Second Edition

The Second Edition contains a number of enrichments and improved features. Most substantively, this edition contains a new language profile on African-American English that is well integrated with Chapter 11: Language in the Social World. The latter has been restructured and updated. In addition, Chapter 2, Phonetics: the Physical Dimensions of Speech Sounds, has been expanded to include a description of British English, and both British and American English are represented in the examples, exercises, and associated sound files. This will make it easier for the text to be used in classrooms in the United Kingdom. It also allows for direct comparison between these two major English dialects.

Other changes include:

- a significant increase in the number of exercises in the primary chapters;
- increased examples from English and other major world languages in the main text and the exercises;
- clarification of the distinction between Textboxes and Sidebars, and the addition of a distinct category of “Stop and Reflect” boxes;
- greater integration of website materials and Language Profiles through increased cross-referencing;
- reduction of highlighted text to better emphasize primary points;
- updated suggestions for further readings;
- overall streamlining of prose.

## [www.cambridge.org/genetti2](http://www.cambridge.org/genetti2)

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.

Online 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.



Online resources for instructors include:

- PowerPoint slides for each chapter;
- 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.



## FOR STUDENTS: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Linguistics is a highly diverse and interdisciplinary field, encompassing phenomena as varied as the concrete details of physical acoustics, abstract logical argument, concise grammatical structures, and 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; every subfield deeply interacts with all others. This book has been designed with students in mind and has many features to facilitate acquisition of the skills necessary to fully appreciate the complexity of language.

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.

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 try to become conscious of language use as you are immersed in it daily. This practice will take your understanding to an entirely new level.

Textboxes contain case studies and important related points and should always be read. “Stop and Reflect” boxes give you the opportunity to consider important questions or try your hand at linguistic analysis; taking time to work through these will facilitate your learning. Sidebars provide information on online resources as well as cross-references to related discussions in other parts of the book. Wireless icons (📶) direct you to specific online resources that are relevant at particular points in the text.

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. You will find that words from other languages are usually broken into their component parts and that translations of the meanings of each part are provided. Often these translations are abbreviated and put in small caps, for example,

sg for singular. Each chapter has a list of the glossing conventions used within it positioned just before the exercises. A full list of all glossing conventions in the book can also be found on pages xviii–xxi.

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 they contribute 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. “Stop and Reflect” boxes prompt you to apply the methods to further data sets. Each chapter has a set of exercises that allow you to analyze new data. In addition, there are many resources on the companion website that serve as aids for improving your analytical skills. These include interactive tutorials, step-by-step instructions, guides to writing in linguistics, and other chapter-specific resources.

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). Chapter-specific glossaries are available on the website. There are also online flashcards for each chapter to help you memorize terms.

Another important component of the website is the addition of sound files. The majority of instances of language use are spoken, and sound is an integral part of most languages (sign languages being the exception). Throughout this book (and 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; these are indicated by the wireless icon. 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.

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. 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 fourteen language profiles, which are case studies

in shorter chapters that focus on particular languages. Your instructor may assign these, or you may just want to explore languages of particular regions or particular types on your own. Reading the whole set of language profiles will serve to significantly advance your understanding of linguistics. Not only do they allow the widespread application of linguistic concepts to many different languages, but 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	Lowland Chontal
11	African-American English, 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 readings with a brief note about each entry; these can provide some potential next steps toward a deeper understanding of this quintessential aspect of our humanity.