

Linguistics

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Differences between accent, dialect, & language in English



Language includes:

- Fields such as:
 - Linguistics, Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology
- Issues such as:
 - Understanding sociality, including human nature, cultural values, power structures, etc.
- Problems such as:
 - Misinterpretation, social inequality, violation of normative conduct

**Interesting info on [Politeness Theory](#)

Prescriptive grammar describes when people focus on talking about how a language *should* or *ought* to be used. One way to remember this association is to think of going to a doctor's office. When a doctor gives you a prescription for medication, it often includes directions about how you should take your medication as well as what you should not do when taking your medication. In a similar way, a prescriptive grammar tells you how you should speak, and what type of language to avoid. This is commonly found in English classes as well as other language classes, where the aim is to teach people how to use language in a very particular (typically described as 'proper' or 'correct') way.

Descriptive grammar, on the other hand, focuses on describing the language as it is used, not saying how it should be used. For example, think about a prescriptive rule like *Don't split infinitives*. A descriptive grammarian would see a sentence like "To boldly go where no man has gone before" and would try to describe how the mental grammar can cause that ordering of words, rather than saying that the surface form is faulty due to prescriptive rules (which would require the sentence "To go boldly where no man has gone before"). Linguistics takes this approach to language.

Types of “correctness”

- Established criteria of educated written language
- Issues on which educated people differ (and which may be different in written and spoken forms, or in different registers of writing and speech)
- Changes in the spoken language that some people resist
- Pure inventions of self-appointed grammarians with little or no basis in actual usage

Noam Chomsky's Theory



Emergentism

- Look back to John Stuart Mill (Utilitarianism!) - “a system can have properties that amount to more than the sum of its parts”
- In opposition to Chomsky’s theories on universal grammar & nativism
- Language is a “new machine built out of old parts” - Bates & MacWhinney

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

“Human beings do not live in the object world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached..We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.” - Sapir

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

“We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in the kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.” - Whorf

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- Individual's thoughts and actions are determined by the language (s) they speak
- All human thoughts and actions are bound by the restraints of language - Stronger interpretation
- Language only somewhat shapes our thinking and behavior - Weaker interpretation

A phoneme is a single "unit" of sound that has meaning in any language. There are 44 phonemes in English (in the standard British model), each one representing a different sound a person can make. Since there are only 26 letters in the alphabet, sometimes letter combinations need to be used to make a phoneme. A letter can also represent different phonemes. Here is a good example:

chef = /ʃef/

choir = /kwaɪə/

cheese = /tʃi:z/

Phonetic Symbols

- **What is the purpose of language?**
- **How does language change? Who gets to determine those changes?**
- **How can language be manipulated?**
- **What's the relationship between culture and language?**