

## Editorial Highlights on Linguistics

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### Editorial Note

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. It involves analysis of language form, language meaning, and language in context, as well as an analysis of the social, cultural, historical, and political factors that influence language.

### History of Linguistics

#### Non-Western Traditions

Linguistic speculation and investigation, insofar as is known, has gone on in only a small number of societies. To the extent that Mesopotamian, Chinese, and Arabic learning dealt with grammar, their treatments were so enmeshed in the particularities of those languages and so little known to the European world until recently that they have had virtually no impact on Western linguistic tradition. Chinese linguistic and philological scholarship stretches back for more than two millennia, but the interest of those scholars was concentrated largely on phonetics, writing, and lexicography; their consideration of grammatical problems was bound up closely with the study of logic.

#### Greek and Roman Antiquity

The emergence of grammatical learning in Greece is less clearly known than is sometimes implied, and the subject is more complex than is often supposed; here only the main strands can be sampled. The term *hē grammatikē technē* ("the art of letters") had two senses. It meant the study of the values of the letters and of accentuation and prosody and, in this sense, was an abstract intellectual discipline; and it also meant the skill of literacy and thus embraced applied pedagogy. This side of what was to become "grammatical" learning was distinctly applied, particular, and less exalted by comparison with other pursuits. Most of the developments associated with theoretical grammar grew out of philosophy and criticism; and in these developments a repeated duality of themes crosses and intertwines.

#### The European Middle Ages

It is possible that developments in grammar during the Middle Ages constitute one of the most misunderstood areas of the field of linguistics. It is difficult to relate this period coherently to other periods and to modern concerns because surprisingly little is accessible and certain, let alone analyzed with sophistication. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the majority of the known grammatical treatises had not yet been made available in full to modern scholarship, so not even their true extent could be classified with confidence.

### Types of Linguistics

#### Phonetics

The study of speech sounds and their physiological production and acoustic qualities. It deals with the configurations of the vocal tract used to produce speech sounds (Articulatory

phonetics), the acoustic properties of speech sounds (acoustic phonetics), and the manner of combining sounds so as to make syllables, words, and sentences (linguistic phonetics).

#### Phonology

Phonology deals with sound structure in individual languages: the way distinctions in sound are used to differentiate linguistic items, and the ways in which the sound structure of the 'same' element varies as a function of the other sounds in its context. Phonology and phonetics both involve sound in natural language, but differ in that phonetics deals with sounds from a language-independent point of view, while phonology studies the ways in which they are distributed and deployed within particular languages. Phonology originated with the insight that much observable phonetic detail is irrelevant or predictable within the system of a given language. This led to the positing of phonemes as minimal contrastive sound units in language, each composed (according to many writers) of a collection of distinctive features of contrast. Later work showed that a focus on surface contrast ultimately was misguided, and generative phonology replaced this with a conception of phonology as an aspect of speakers' knowledge of linguistic structure.

### The Most Famous Linguist

#### Noam Chomsky

Probably the best-known name on this list, Noam Chomsky is famous for many things. But within the realm of linguistics, he's most famous for his idea of universal grammar, which poses that all languages have the same underlying structure, and simply use different words and sounds on the surface.

#### Linguistics in Everyday Life

Language use is an essential human ability: Whether it's telling a joke, naming a baby, using voice recognition software, or helping a relative who's had a stroke, you'll find the study of language reflected in almost everything you do. Linguists spend their days seeking answers to questions like the following and so many more, because language and linguistics play such a fundamental role in every human's life."

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