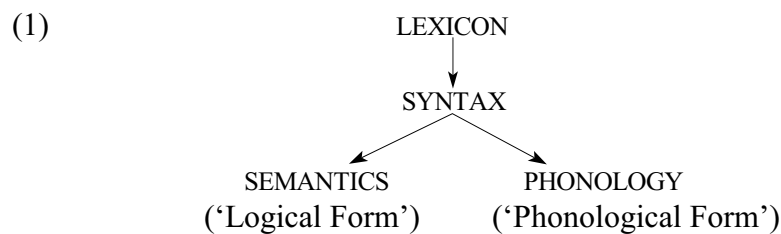


## **I Introduction**

### **I.1 The structure of the course**

The aim of the following lecture notes for the *Foundations of Linguistics* course is to sketch a broad overview of the main issues and hypotheses in each of the subdisciplines of linguistic enquiry, with an eye towards developing a comprehensive introduction to linguistics in preparation for a more in-depth investigation of the individual domains in specialised courses. The lecture notes come in four separate but interconnected installments (not counting this general introduction) of comparable length (approx. 20 pages each). Segment II discusses morphology (words), segment III is about syntax (phrases and sentences), segment IV presents an overview of semantics and pragmatics (meaning), and segment V introduces phonetics and phonology (sound).

In ordering the segments in this way, the lecture series follows in the footsteps of the textbook that will serve as background for the course: Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams (2011), *An Introduction to Language*. Many other introductory textbooks follow a different path, usually starting with sounds, the smallest component parts of language. Our rationale for starting with words instead of sounds is three-fold: (a) words are probably the most intuitive ingredient of linguistic analysis (every language user has some intuition about what is and isn't a word; although this intuition may be misleading, it serves as a helpful starting point to get into the material); (b) the analysis of the sound system can be appreciated better when viewed against the background of the analysis of sentence structure; and (c) in the prevalent theoretical framework (generative linguistics, dating back to Noam Chomsky's pioneering work starting in the mid-1950s), linguistic analysis starts out from the lexicon (the repository of words and morphological formatives), on the basis of which a syntactic structure is formed, which is subsequently interpreted by the semantic and phonological components:



The textbook mentioned in the previous paragraph is not the only companion to this series of lecture notes. In addition, the *Foundations of Linguistics* course features a set of animated slide shows, made available on the course material website of the School of English and American Studies. These slide shows (referred to by the acronym 'FoLiAGE', which stands for *Foundations of Linguistics: A Grammatical Exploration*) are ideally studied in preparation for the weekly lectures, to get a sense of what the lecture will be about. Immediately after the lecture would be a good time to read the relevant portion of the lecture notes, to solidify and fully internalise the material. The optimal approach to the textbook is to read it from cover to cover at the earliest possible opportunity, and to return to the individual chapters of the textbook in conjunction with the slide shows and lecture notes.

## **I.2 Linguistics and the mentalist approach**

Linguistics is the scientific study of human natural language. Many theoretical approaches to linguistics take the representation of the human language capacity in the mind/brain of individual language users as its central object of study. We will follow this trend. Because it places its main emphasis on the representation of the linguistic system in the mind/brain, this is usually called the MENTALIST approach to language — from Latin *mens* ‘mind’ (as in the famous saying *mens sana in corpore sano* ‘a healthy mind in a healthy body’).

All over the world, regardless of where they are born, what their socio-economic circumstances are, and how high their IQ may be, normally developing children who grow up in a linguistic environment (i.e., in a society in which language is used on a regular basis around them) end up acquiring the language(s) of their environment, without the need for explicit instruction. The speed and efficacy of this language acquisition process should not be underestimated: it is no mean feat that roughly by the age of 6, children have acquired their native language(s) essentially in full. To be sure, they may not be able to read and write yet, and they may not yet be able to speak with the sophistication and sentential complexity of a philosopher — but six-year-olds are equipped with everything they need to be able to become a master of rhetoric. Reading and writing are, it is worth stressing, extraneous aspects of human language: one does not need to be able to read or write in order to speak or understand one’s native language. And mastering foreign languages at a later age is also a skill very different from acquiring one’s native language in the first few years of one’s existence. So reading, writing, rhetoric, and foreign-language learning are all outside the scope of what we will be looking at in this series of lectures. These are domains of academic enquiry in their own right, and there are plenty of opportunities to delve into them once the foundations of an understanding of linguistic theory have been laid. But laying these foundations is our first order of business.

## **I.3 Language and structure**

Throughout this series, a notion of STRUCTURE will be of paramount importance. For linguistic data of all plumage, a proper understanding of them can arise only if we have an opportunity to think about them in a structured (rather than random) way, and regulate the building of linguistic structures in a rigorous and principled way. A key ingredient of this series, therefore, will be to instill an understanding of the structures of linguistic expressions and the processes that they undergo, at every level of analysis, and to make it clear how the building of these structures and the distribution of these processes are regulated.

## **I.4 Some caveats and disclaimers**

The author has made every effort to provide explicit discussion of the essentials of linguistic analysis in a narrative that is structured logically and presented accessibly, written with an eye towards the specific needs and restrictions imposed by the intended audience: the students in the Department of English Linguistics at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. The emphasis in the discussion throughout will be on English; but because many of the students in this department are native speakers of Hungarian, the exemplification of central aspects of the theory will occasionally draw on Hungarian data. The discussion of material from languages other than English and Hungarian is kept to a minimum; a more diverse set of illustrations is provided in the Fromkin *et al.* textbook.

The author has taken care to ensure that all the material presented in the following segments is accurate, and will welcome feedback from readers aimed at improving (the presentation of) the material.

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