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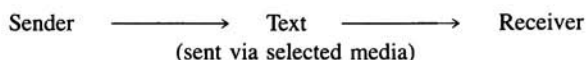
Language and Linguistics

Before pursuing the study of language and discourse from a linguistic perspective, let us examine our preconceptions about language. If you ask people to define language, most will tell you that it is our means of communication; some may add that it is the ability to produce and understand words, rather than simple cries and yells, that separate humans from animals. While these observations are correct, a more exacting linguistic definition of language will provide us with an invaluable foundation for our inquiry into how to improve the quality of our written texts.

THE COMMUNICATION CIRCUIT

What is necessary for communication to take place? Communication occurs when a sender deliberately and intentionally sends information to a receiver via a signaling system. The communication circuit consists of three primary elements: sender, receiver, and text.¹ The sender's intent is to convey some kind of meaningful information to the receiver. He

does this by selecting the appropriate medium, such as speaking, writing, dancing, or drumming, and the appropriate form, such as conversation, personal letter, tribal ritual, journal article, or picture. Thus communication is not limited to written and spoken discourse; it also includes sign language, codes (such as Morse code and FORTRAN), pictures (including international road signs, graphs, and drawings), and animal cries. The text is the specific message sent, and if the sender is successful, the receiver will understand the sender's intended meaning.



In rhetoric, these three elements correspond to the corners of the rhetorical triangle. Whereas communication participants have received substantial attention in rhetoric, in linguistics it was not until the recent development of the fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics that the roles of the sender and receiver really received systematic attention. Traditionally, linguistics focused on the text and treated the people communicating as ideal and stereotypical, as abstract entities. Consequently, linguists could not account for individual and group differences in how people speak and use language. For example, a Southern speaker may say "ya'll come with," while a Northern speaker would say "you all will come with me." Both convey the identical message; however, the difference in pronunciation ("ya" for "you"), the dropping of the modal verb (e.g., "can," "may," "will") and the personal pronoun referring to the speaker are entirely acceptable in the South. Such differences are inconsequential; they do not affect the message. In addition, linguistics had concentrated on describing how we produce and comprehend literal utterances. It could not accommodate for the fact that a speaker might be lying, speaking figuratively, or joking. The personal and societal factors of communication—attitudes toward what is being said and who is saying it, knowledge of forms of communication (e.g., conventions for stories, journal articles, and procedures for initiating and maintaining conversations), and recognition of the impact of the social setting—were beyond the scope of linguistics. During the 1960s, interest in how language was actually being used by speakers spurred re-

search in the field of pragmatics, which investigates how a message is used by participants to accomplish an end or goal. More recently, sociolinguistics has gone further in accounting for the role of the participants by investigating how the communication setting, as well as cultural knowledge passed down in societies, directs and provides cues to the reader about how to interpret a message.

The medium chosen also defines certain parameters of communication; speaking and writing are significantly different mediums. Spoken conversation has an immediacy that written discourse lacks. Since both participants are present, they can constantly monitor communication to ensure that all messages are successfully conveyed and correctly understood. Consider the fact that when engaged in a conversation, if you do not understand what the other person has said, you can stop and ask questions. If the speaker senses confusion by your facial expressions, she can repeat what she has said. Written discourse is different. The sender is absent. Because the reader cannot ask the writer to clarify confusing material, the writer must be especially careful in choosing how to present the text in order to ensure the intended meaning is understood.

While this description makes it sound as if spoken discourse is always preferable to written, written discourse has definite advantages. The grammar of a written text is more precise and grammatically correct than that of speech. In spoken language we find more incomplete sentences and more unnecessary filler words and phrases like "a lot of," "well," and "you know." Thoughts in spoken discourse are strung together primarily with "and" and "but" (coordinating) constructions, whereas "that," "which," "while," and "besides" (subordinating) constructions predominate in written discourse. Written texts are more polished. Speakers refine and qualify expressions as they go along by phrases, such as "I meant" and "it was really." In writing, readers expect that the writer has finished refining the text before disseminating it. In addition, the writer can take more time choosing words and arranging the text and can revise the text before it is ever read by the intended audience. The receiver can also read the text more than once, extracting more information, and perhaps correcting initial false impres-

sions about the writer's intended message by continually referring back to the text. The choice of medium will be dictated by the needs of the sender and receiver. As specialists in the field of communication, we must be aware of the fact that the rules and strategies for creating successful written prose are not the same as those for spoken discourse.

HUMAN LANGUAGE

Apes, chimpanzees, and dolphins seem capable of communicating with one another; however, their communication systems are very simple. They cannot communicate about abstract concepts and ideas or "talk" about objects that are not in their immediate vicinity. Their communication apparatus is limited to simple gestures and a very limited range of vocal utterances that vary primarily in pitch and volume. On the other hand, human speech is made up of discrete units which, loosely speaking, correspond to vowel and consonant sounds.

While animal communication systems are genetically inherited, this is not true of human language. At birth, humans are predisposed to learn language: the ability to learn is genetically inherited, but language itself is learned from interaction with individuals in society. If a child were raised in an environment where language was never used, that child would never learn a language. Fortunately, children are nurtured in a language-rich environment, and they quickly acquire language skills.

Social interaction is fundamental to human language. More precisely, our language is socially dependent and conventional. This means that our language is defined and controlled by the community in which we live; all speakers within our language community agree to abide by a system of rules, called grammar, which governs our language.

THE ELEMENTS OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

Language is like a game of chess. In chess, there is a set of rules we must learn in order to play the game. Each piece can only move in certain directions: the bishop can only move on the diagonal. Some pieces can move only a certain number of squares: the king only moves

one square at a time. How a player captures an opponent's pieces is determined by the rules of the game: pawns capture on the diagonal. And the game can only be won by checkmating the king. But there is an infinite combination of moves that may ensue during the course of each individual game, and a player freely selects each individual move. Language works the same way as chess. Grammar is our set of language rules. It governs our language and assures us that we will be understood. While the meaningful units of each individual utterance are freely selected by the speaker from an infinitely large number of morphemes, the grammar imposes structure on the way those selections are combined and actually uttered or written.

Look at the following group of words. Can you decipher the sentence?

that of is rules all speakers to by agree
grammar called abide system the

As this jumble of words proves, without grammar we could not understand one another. (The sentence is, "All speakers agree to abide by the system of rules that is called grammar.") Without this system of rules we all agree upon, our grammar, any jumble or sequence of words would be allowed. If all combinations of words were permissible, language users would not be able to produce, decipher, or understand any combinations. We would have no clues about how to extract the meaning from a sentence or utterance.²

Grammar consists of two elements: syntax and morphology. Syntax is the order of words in a sentence. Morphology concerns the units of meaning into which words can be divided, both what the word denotes and the prefixes and suffixes which indicate such information as the tense of a verb and the number—singular or plural—of a noun. Morphemes, units of meaning, are divided into two types: free radicals are the base words and bound radicals are the prefixes and suffixes appended to words. For example, "anti-," "re-," "un-," "-ed," "es," and "-tion" have no meaning when they stand alone. "Un-discipline-d" has three morphemes, as does "re-use-able": "discipline" and "use" are free radicals; "un-," "-ed," "re-," and "-able" are bound radicals. Though

the grammars of all languages consist of rules for both syntax and morphology, many languages are more dependent on one of these two components for the basic information about the function of words in the sentence. Consider how different languages signal whether a noun is being used as a subject or object. English and other Germanic languages have a fairly fixed sentence order; we know how the word is being used by its position (relative to other words) in the sentence. Romance languages, such as Latin and Spanish, depend more on inflections to indicate the function of words in a sentence; it is the suffix of the word rather than its position that signals its function.

In addition to the grammatical elements of a language, there are phonological elements. Every language has a grammar and a phonological system. Phonemes are the smallest discrete sound units of language, and the study of phonemes is called phonology. Phonemes correspond to sound elements, not to the letters of the alphabet. There is not a direct one-to-one correspondence between the vowels and consonants of the alphabet and the phonemes in English. Consonant clusters such as “ch,” “th,” and “sh” are phonemes. Some phonemes can be represented by more than one letter, as in “cease,” where both “s” and “c” correspond to the same phoneme. Some letters can also be used to represent more than one phoneme such as “c,” which is hard in “cat” (also represented in English by the letter “k”) and soft in “niece” (also represented in English by the letter “s”). Recognized phonemes vary from one language to another: English recognizes the phoneme represented by “sh,” while some other languages do not; Greek recognizes “kh” as a phoneme and English does not; some African languages recognize guttural sounds and clicks as phonemes, although they are not recognized in any European or Asian language. Taken together, the grammar and phonological system make each language unique.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUALITIES OF LANGUAGE

Surprisingly, we can utter phrases and sentences that we have never heard before. This means that our language is not imitative; what we have heard and read before does not limit what we may say or write in

the future. Our ability to produce utterances we have not heard before is known as language productivity or creativity. A native speaker can speak an infinitely large number of utterances he has never heard before, and he can also understand a speaker or a text containing combinations he has not encountered before. Remember, without grammar this would be impossible. The finite number of rules and conventions of grammar restrict the infinite number of combinations of language elements, thereby ensuring that we understand others and they understand us. Creativity, or productivity, is one of the defining features of language identified by Hockett.³ He proposed a set of design features of language that would serve to characterize how language differs from other forms of (animal and human) communication. In addition to creativity, arbitrariness, discreteness, and duality are the fundamental qualities of all human languages.

Arbitrariness refers to the fact that there is nothing intrinsic in an object such as a table that demands we call it “table” in English or “*mesa*” in Spanish. The word chosen to represent the thing is arbitrary and is accepted by society. The society must share the same “words” for objects and ideas for communication to be possible.

Discreteness is a feature of the phonological system. In animal communication, the pitch of a cry may have different meanings: a shrill cry may signal danger; a lower pitched cry may express pleasure. In human language, there is no gradation of units of sound. Each phoneme is absolute. In music, fortissimo signals loudness, a note drawn on the third space of the staff signals high C versus middle C, and the whole notes, half notes, and quarter notes signal different durations. In language there is no loud “b,” high “b,” or half “b.” There is only the phoneme, represented by the letter “b.” The sounds of each language are absolute, and in each language only certain phonemes may follow one another. For instance, English does not recognize the sequence “bh” or “dl.”

The last of the fundamental qualities is duality. Language duality simply refers to the fact that each language has two essential components—a grammar and a phonetic system.

Hockett lists twelve additional design qualities of language, and two worth noting here. The first is prevarication, the ability to deceive,

misinform, or lie to a receiver. Linguistics had until recently only dealt with situations where the speaker genuinely wants her message to be understood. We will see how this quality remains one of the most difficult for linguists to account for in communication theories. The last quality worth noting is language reflexiveness. Reflexiveness refers to the ability of people to create a language which comments on language itself. This language about language is often referred to as “metalanguage.” Linguistics, rhetoric, philosophy of language, and critical theory are all types of metalanguage; these types of discourse allow us to examine and evaluate the language that we use.

THE EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH

English is descended from the Germanic family of languages that also includes German and Dutch. This group differs from the Romance language family which includes Spanish, French, and Italian. All Germanic languages have a two-tense verb system. Germanic languages recognize only the past and present tense, and commonly use the “d” or “t” suffix to indicate past tense. Future, progressive (ongoing), perfective (completed), and punctual (occurring at a single point in time) action in these languages are expressed through the use of modal and auxiliary verbs, not by simply modifying the form of the main verb itself, as in Romance languages.

Both Germanic and Romance languages, as well as many other languages spoken in Europe and Asia, descend from the original parent language, Indo-European, which was spoken approximately 5,000 years ago. We do not know what this language was like, since we have no written records, but efforts are being made to reconstruct some of its elements based on the evolution of the more modern languages. All languages descending from Indo-European began as inflectional languages, including English. The conjugation of verbs was much more complicated than it is today: a verb had a different form depending on whether the subject was “I,” “you” (singular), “he/she/it,” “we,” “you” (plural), or “they.” Inflections were used to signify a noun’s case, gender, and number—information conveyed in Modern English by word

order and prepositions. For instance, the word “stone” in Old English (English before the Normal Conquest of 1066), was declined as follows:

<i>Case</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
nominative (subject)	stan	stanas
genitive (possessive)	stanes	stana
accusative (direct object)	stan	stanas
dative (indirect object)	stane	stanum
instrumental (object used to accomplish an action)	stane	stanum

During the Middle English period (1066–1500) the declension was reduced to one we recognize:

<i>Case</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
common case (includes nominative, accusative, dative)	stone	stones
genitive	stone’s	stones’

(We no longer use the instrumental case; we signify it in other ways as with the prepositions “by” and “with.”)

Though Old English may look very complicated, even foreign, Modern English shares many qualities with its predecessor.⁴ Sixty to seventy percent of the words we use in every sentence descend directly from Old English. Many of the words that have descended to contemporary English are function words (as well as many monosyllabic nouns for common items and simple action verbs). Function words include articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. They are a small and stable set of words that allow us to make sense of utterances, giving such information as the function (or case) of the noun that follows. Their primary role is to indicate how other words in the sentence relate. Note the number of function words that occur in the following sentence (the function words are italicized):

They are a small and stable set of words that allow us to make sense of our language.

The rest of the words in the sentence are content words which name objects, concepts, qualities, processes, and actions. ("Small," "set," "word," and "make" are content words that also descend from Old English.) The function words, like grammar, are tools that render our language comprehensible.

Today, we are able to make sense of utterances because syntax allows for only certain word combinations in certain sequences. Instead of depending primarily on inflection, Modern English depends primarily on function words and word order. The most common sentence type, a simple declarative sentence, has subject-verb-direct object word order. In Old English, the direct object could precede the verb, and listeners and readers would have no problem comprehending the language, since the inflectional ending signaled that the first word was the object. In contemporary English, a shift in order signifies a sentence type other than declarative, such as a command or question, or marks a dialect, such as Hawaiian Pidgin.

Together, function words and syntactic restrictions are essential for generating coherent phrases and sentences that all language users can understand.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS

Linguistics and Philology

Before the turn of the century, linguistics was synonymous with philology. Philology, meaning "love of the word," was primarily a study of literature and other written records. The first philologists concentrated on written texts (particularly literary texts), comparing various periods and styles of writing. By the end of the eighteenth century, philology diverged into two schools: the old interest in the styles of literary works continued, along with a newer and more narrowly defined field that concentrated on "the interpretation of the language of written records." This more narrowly defined philological study delved into phonology (the way the language was spoken, as deduced from written records) and morphology of the texts under scrutiny. In the nineteenth century, philological studies were predominantly of this latter type.

The early part of the nineteenth century was dominated by the work of Rasmus Rask of Denmark, Jacob Grimm, Franz Bopp, and other Germans, men devoted to the comparative study of Indo-European languages, particularly the comparison of phonetic and morphological features. Because of the pioneering work of these men, comparative philology—the comparison of related languages—gained recognition as an independent science. While scholars of this time were interested in comparing records of various languages, their studies were ahistorical. That is, they did not recognize that certain languages or dialects predated others. Therefore, many errors about the relations of various languages were made due to the fact that a language currently in use may have been compared to the records of another language that had been in use 500 years earlier. Once philologists took history into account, great strides in comparative philology were quickly made, and philologists became better able to identify and compare features of languages that revealed their actual historical relationships.

Influenced in part by Darwin's biological work (1850–80), philologists soon became interested in constructing genealogical trees of language families, illustrating how modern languages evolved from ancient ones. By comparing languages with respect to the period in which they were actually in use, a true picture of the development of languages could be achieved. Attempts were also made to reconstruct a prototype of the first language, Indo-European, which gave rise to the languages of most of the Eurasian continent. By the 1870s, historical comparative philology was well established through the contributions of such men as Hermann Paul, Eduard Sievers, and William Whitney. Until the work of the structural linguists, beginning with Ferdinand Saussure, linguistics remained primarily a historical study.

Saussure and the Dawn of Structural Linguistics

Ferdinand Saussure is the father of modern linguistics. In the early part of this century (ca. 1915), he succeeded in pioneering a formal system of linguistic study called structural linguistics.⁵ Saussure introduced many important principles for a systematic study of language, among

the most important: the distinction between diachronic and synchronic language study, the distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and the description of the nature of the linguistic sign.

Diachronic linguistics is the historical study of language, whereas synchronic linguistics is the geographic study of language. Diachronic linguistics refers to the study of how a language evolves over a period of time. Tracing the development of English from the Old English period to the twentieth century is a diachronic study. A synchronic study of language is a comparison of languages or dialects—various spoken differences of the same language—used within some defined spatial region and during the same period of time. Determining the regions of the United States in which people currently say “pop” rather than “soda” and “idea” rather than “idear” are examples of the types of inquiries pertinent to a synchronic study.

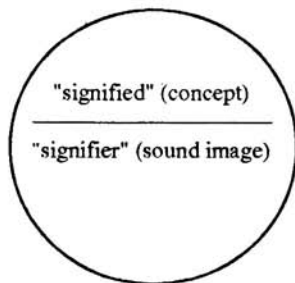
While vocabulary and pronunciation vary across geographic region, Saussure also recognized that there is a difference between how a given society or language community defines language and how any one individual uses it. Socially defined language, which Saussure terms “*langue*,” corresponds to what was earlier described as the conventional aspect of language. It is the shared system of rules, the knowledge of what others will accept and understand, that we all share. “*Parole*” is the individual’s use of, and facility with, the language. To study *parole*, the linguist looks at individual’s actual utterances.

Saussure was also the first to define the symbolic nature of human language. Symbols, icons, and indices are all types of signs, but a symbol differs from the other two types which have some intrinsic connection to, or share some inherent quality with, the objects they represent. Icons communicate their meaning by their physical similarity to the item represented: imagine the now popular international road signs—silhouettes of pedestrians crossing a road or of rocks falling. Indices point to the item signified by their physical proximity to the object referred to: a black cloud is an index of rain, the scent of chocolate chips is an index of fresh-baked Toll House cookies. Thus, there is some logical connection underlying the relationship between an icon or index and what it refers to, its referent. But language is a symbolic

system. Symbols share no inherent quality with their referents. No logical connection exists between the word and the concept, object, or action to which it refers. The relationship is conventional. There is no reason “t-a-b-l-e” rather than “s-t-e-p” should refer to that four-legged flat surface on which small items are set, other than the fact that English speakers agree to accept that “table” is a symbol for that object.

Saussure describes, in detail, the symbolic nature of language by delineating the nature of the linguistic sign. Remember that the sign used in language, the linguistic sign, is always a symbol. It is composed of two parts: the signified and the signifier.

The Linguistic Sign



The signified corresponds to the concept referred to. But this is not a physical object set in the real world; it is a concept formed in each individual's mind. This is important since if I say “tree,” some people may think of deciduous maples, while others think of coniferous pine trees. Some may imagine a tree ornamented with the red and gold leaves of fall. Some may imagine the bare branches of a winter tree. Some may imagine a tree in bloom. But no matter the image, each is still a “tree.” The signifier is the sound image of the word, which is in part defined by the language of the speaker: “t-r-e-e” in English or “a-r-b-o-r” in Latin. Together the signified and signifier form a mental construct: they do not represent the thing we see and the word we utter, but instead, a concept and a sound image. Saussure emphasizes this distinction. Traditionally, sign referred simply to the “word,” but the sign for Saussure consisted

of the two intimately united elements—signified and signifier. The signifier is arbitrarily chosen to represent the signified; the language community then agrees to accept the association. The linguistic sign is totally arbitrary.

The acceptance of the theory of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign quelled all theories that language originally developed by onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia refers to words which resemble the sounds associated with the things to which they refer, such as “choo-choo” for train. Saussure and his disciples successfully argued that the few onomatopoeic words could not account for the development of the vocabulary of a language.⁶

Chomsky's Transformational Grammar

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Noam Chomsky's work created a revolution in linguistic theory. Chomsky introduced the theory of transformational grammar, a system by which he proposed to explain all potential sentences uttered and understood by all people. Transformational grammar consists of a set of rules and options for transforming the ideas or content of an utterance into syntactically ordered, grammatically acceptable sentences.⁷

Chomsky's primary goal was to explain language productivity and creativity. Building on Saussure's concepts of *langue* and *parole*, he distinguished between language competence (our ability to produce and perceive language that we have not heard before, obviously owing to our knowledge of grammar) and language performance (the individual's utterances). His grammar is a dynamic and innovative explanation of how various individual utterances can be derived, and is one of the first attempts to explain how the mind actually uses *langue*—grammatical rules and information—to come up with proper sentence structures, and individual's *parole*. His grammar, along with other alternatives to traditional grammar that we will look at, may be more powerful systems for analyzing language than the eight parts of speech grammar we learned in elementary school, because these alternative grammars more accurately represent the way we use and understand language.

Chomsky's theory works on the assumption that everyone who speaks a given language uses the same grammatical constructions as everyone else; all speakers belong to a "homogeneous" language community. This means that everyone who speaks a particular dialect of English, such as Midwestern or Southern, speaks it without any (significant) variation in pronunciation or grammatical constructions, and does not borrow forms from other dialects. Thus, you speak a dialect of American English such as Southern, or you speak a dialect of British English such as Cockney. Once your language community has been identified, it is assumed that all speakers of that community will use the same grammatical constructions; individual variations are marginal and insignificant. This has been found to be incorrect. While most people do only speak a limited number of languages or dialects, all people use a range of styles when they speak. Each of us belongs to many language communities, and the styles we speak to our children, to our loved ones, and to our co-workers all have different characteristics. We use different degrees of formality, various intonations, different types of idioms, jargon, and technical terms, all of which constitute our discourse in different settings with various people.

Basically, Chomsky's system dealt with language and grammar isolated from the circumstances in which it was uttered or written. The concerns, attitudes, and inclinations of speaker and hearer were not considered. Language was abstracted from its interpersonal context. Yet, Chomsky's work is fundamental to all subsequent developments in linguistic theory and artificial intelligence, spurring linguists to explore language in new ways.

Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics

Through the 1950s, linguists treated language as if its primary function was transactional: language was the means for the efficient communication of information. But during the 1960s, this stance began to be challenged. Some theorists, in the emerging fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, recognized that the acceptance of the transactional model meant excluding many other functions of language from study.

For instance, language can be used to enlist someone's help in achieving a goal, to elicit an emotional response, to entertain, or to deceive. Pragmatists and sociolinguists are better equipped to examine such uses of language, because in these fields the participants and the communication setting are considered essential elements that must be studied in order to understand how language is used in any given situation. No longer is the text of a conversation or of a written communication studied in isolation. Pragmatics focuses on what the participants intend to accomplish through language. Sociolinguistics stresses the fact that the participants, as well as the setting in which they are communicating, shape the ensuing discourse.

Pragmatics was the first of the two fields to emerge. John Austin⁸ and John Searle⁹ laid the foundation for this still vital field of linguistic research. Pragmatics is the study of language in use. Pragmatists assert that language is always used to achieve a goal—to inform, to motivate someone to do something, to make a promise or request. Pragmatics aims to identify the conditions placed on the speaker, the listener, the text, and the setting in order to ensure that the goal is accomplished.

People's expectations, attitudes, desires, and goals will all impact the success or failure of any communication. Sociolinguistics examines the interpersonal and social factors that influence communication.¹⁰ To understand the interpersonal dimensions of communication, we must know more about the participants, including their age, education, and ethnicity. We must know what relationship exists between the participants. Are they peers? Are they intimate? Are they from different rungs of the social ladder? Is one a superior and the other a subordinate in the workplace? Such relationships determine the formality of the language we use, the amount of slang and technical jargon we use, and how much we feel we can intimate and still assume we will be understood. The setting is also a factor determining how we speak: the speech in a men's locker room will be different than that of a college classroom. The place itself imposes certain restrictions on what is acceptable.

Pragmatics is considered to be a more systematic and analytical study than sociolinguistics. In pragmatics, the goal is to identify, delineate, and categorize the rules and conditions that determine whether

communication will succeed or fail. Sociolinguistics tends to deal with the less tangible aspects of communication, dealing more with how human behavior influences what we say and understand.

MODERN LINGUISTICS AND THE WRITTEN TEXT

Modern linguistics has always strongly asserted the primacy of the spoken word over the written. Thus, linguists of this century have been far more interested in studying oral discourse than in explaining how written texts are constructed. Written discourse, which has only existed in the past 5,000 years, has always been treated as a derivative of speech—subordinate to it—since social interaction can be achieved by spoken discourse alone. Yet, from anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to philosopher Jacques Derrida, a compelling argument has been made that written discourse is central to the establishment and preservation of the institutions of knowledge and learning that constitute history and culture.¹¹ Written texts provide a historical record that can be disseminated throughout a society and passed on to later generations. But such a record is not necessary to ensure the survival of a community; speech suffices for societal communication needs such as the tasks of food gathering and bartering. Illiteracy is the norm in Third World countries, and people there go about their daily business without the advantage of knowing how to read and write.

Written texts, in and of themselves, did not become a subject of linguistic study until the late 1960s, due to the emergence of the field of text linguistics. Text linguistics, often building on the work of earlier linguistic theories, attempts to explain how texts are produced and comprehended. "Text" refers to both spoken and written communication that extends beyond a sentence. As a larger unit of communication, a text must be coherent—make logical sense—and the ideas must be connected and presented in a grammatically acceptable form. Text linguistics differs from other fields of linguistics in making written discourse one of its central objects of investigation.

Text linguistics has actually become an interdisciplinary pursuit. To understand how texts make sense, linguists have had to enlist the aid of

cognitive psychologists in an effort to understand how the mind actually processes language. Text comprehension depends on our ability to relate new ideas to knowledge we have already stored in memory. Thus, some familiarity with how we cognitively process information is a prerequisite for discussing texts. How cognitive psychology illuminates the study of written discourse is the subject of chapter 2, and psychology also provides a foundation for the discussion of coherence and cohesion that follows in chapters 4 and 5. One of the most recent areas of investigation in text linguistics has been in the area of macrostructures. Macrostructures, which are the subject of chapter 6, help to explain how large-scale concepts, themes, and topics are organized and delimit text development.

This book covers theories fundamental to research in text linguistics. But, while text linguistics is devoted to describing how texts are created and understood, my intent is also to demonstrate how practical applications of linguistic theories can enhance the writing, editing, and analysis of nonliterary texts. For this reason, I return to many areas of modern linguistics which have been concerned solely, or primarily, with spoken discourse. Much of this material, with some slight revision, also sheds light on written communication. You will find that throughout the chapters, I will discuss “the speaker” and “listener” (or “audience”) when discussing theories that were originally intended to examine spoken utterances, in an effort to remain true to the theorists’ work, but the application sections will show how, with care, principles used to study spoken discourse can be adapted to illuminate aspects of written discourse as well.