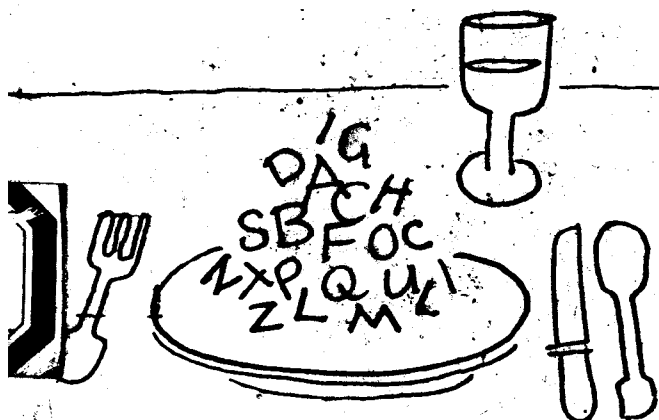


J.M.Y. Simpson
**A First *Course* in
Linguistics.**



< A First Course in Linguistics >

J.M.Y. SIMPSON

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Preface

This is an introductory textbook for those with no knowledge of linguistics. It was designed as background for students receiving specialised courses of lectures; but it may equally well be used by the interested reader working alone.

The principal aim is of course to outline something of contemporary linguistics; yet I envisage other objectives. For example, I am concerned to impart awareness of the diverse phenomena found in natural languages: students of linguistics must not remain content with a knowledge limited to the patterns of the more commonly taught European tongues (and regrettably even this is denied to many educated in English-speaking countries). Secondly, I hope my readers will be stimulated to examine with new ears and eyes those languages they already know. Furthermore, since various schools of linguistics exist, it must be made clear that there is no 'correct' approach and that questions concerning the nature of linguistic theories and their comparison arise, even though they cannot be dealt with in this book. Above all, those being introduced to linguistics will, I trust, be encouraged to read primary texts, aided by an appreciation of a wider perspective in which to view them.

A first textbook cannot survey all the activities that have been or are being carried out by linguists (nor would that be desirable) and only a restricted number of topics is handled in the present volume; my selection has been governed by the need to expound not only that which I consider most important but also that which has gained general fame (or notoriety), though to some extent these categories coincide. Underlying the presentation is a conviction that knowledge of a subject's historical development is crucial to an appreciation of its contemporary state. Indeed it may not always be possible to apply the word 'outmoded' to a linguistic approach save in a purely chronological sense.

I may not agree with every linguistic viewpoint I describe, yet while I have had no qualms about inventing my own illustrations and examples, I trust that I have explained the arguments of others without distortion. Suggestions for further reading, including much primary literature, follow the text of the present chapters. And suggestions are also given for reading in areas of linguistics not

Preface

covered in this book, for it is unfortunately possible to encounter advanced students (and scholars of other disciplines) who suffer from linguistic tunnel-vision and imagine that one particular linguistic school or other is the only valid approach: I am concerned to dispel such ignorance. Since not everyone is conversant with the still indispensable technical terms of traditional grammar, a glossary of these is given.

A linguist of all people will not deny the truth of Donne's famous metaphor '*No man is an Iland*', least of all one who undertakes a book like this. Many people have contributed wittingly or unwittingly to the present volume, and it is they who should be thanked for all that is good in it.

My debts in matters linguistic cannot be repaid to the late C.T. Carr, my beloved mentor in Germanic letters and philology; to Edward Ullendorff, whose kindness not only enabled me to behold the Aladdin's Cave of Semitic philology, but introduced me to the works of de Saussure, Trubetzkoy, Sapir and Bloomfield; and to my teachers (later colleagues) in the University of Edinburgh, particularly to David Abercrombie, whose lucidity of thought and independence from mere fashion are matched by brilliant teaching and generous encouragement of his students.

Complete drafts of earlier elephantine versions of this book were read by David Abercrombie, Geoffrey Leech and R.H. Robins, all of whom made many detailed observations, and sections of various lengths were scrutinised and commented on by Jacques Durand, John Fox, Thomas MacCaffrey, M.K.C. MacMahon, M.L. Samuels, Peter Swinbank and W.S.-Y. Wang. These kind friends saved me from lapses into incomprehensibility, from errors and from idiocies, and must not be blamed for any blunders that I may have introduced despite their help, or for any particular points of view I express. Encouragement to write, and to continue, was entertainingly given by various people, particularly Sheila MacCrindle and above all Peggy Drinkwater. John Fox undertook the chore of compiling an index. Cecily Smith deserves the utmost praise for typing imperturbably and accurately innumerable drafts from typescripts and manuscripts of my own, all illegibly palimpsestuous. And my students over the years, as every teacher will empathise, have contributed to my own understanding to an extent that would astonish them if they but knew. To everyone I have mentioned I am humbly grateful.

J.M.Y. Simpson

Glasgow, November 1978

Transcriptional Conventions

- Asterisks are prefixed to unrecorded forms (including both conjectural reconstructions and impossibilities).
- Square brackets enclose phonetic or partly allophonic transcriptions and slant lines phonemic transcriptions (see Chapter 8).
- Examples from languages written in the Roman alphabet are given in their usual orthography followed by a more or less phonemic transcription in phonetic symbols. (For an explanation of these see the list of *Phonetic Symbols* opposite.) Occasional examples are given only in orthography, and these may read as though written in phonetic symbols (except that Latin *c* = /k/ and *qu* = /kw/).
- Ancient Greek appears in a transliteration which may be read as our phonetic symbols. Sanskrit appears in the conventional transliteration which may be read as our phonetic symbols, except that \tilde{n} = /ɲ/, \tilde{n} = /ŋ/, y = /j/ and long vowels are marked by a bar, e.g. \bar{a} = /a:/. Other languages normally written in non-Roman scripts are quoted here only in phonetic symbols.
- The use of other symbols is explained in the course of the text.
- Linguistic examples drawn from English are not generally prefixed by the word 'English'.

Phonetic Symbols

- a unrounded open front vowel, as in RP *hat*; primary CV symbol.
- ɑ unrounded open back vowel, as in RP *baln*; primary CV symbol.
- ɒ rounded open back vowel, as in RP *pot*; secondary CV symbol.
- b voiced bilabial plosive, as in *bee*.
- ɓ voiced bilabial implosive, as in Hausa *bauna*, 'buffalo'.
- β voiced bilabial fricative, as in Spanish *saber*, 'to know'.
- c voiceless palatal plosive, as in Hungarian *tyuk*, 'chicken'.
- ç voiceless palatal fricative, as in German *ich*, 'I' and some pronunciations of *hue*.
- ɕ voiceless alveolo-palatal fricative, as in Polish, *środa*, 'Wednesday'.
- ɔ rounded half-open back vowel, as in RP *caught*; primary CV symbol.
- d voiced alveolar plosive, as in *day*.
- ɖ voiced retroflex plosive, as in Hindi *dəs*, 'ten'; Swedish *mord*, 'murder'.
- ð voiced dental fricative, as in *those*.
- e unrounded half-close front vowel, as in French *thé*, 'tea'; Sc. English *day*; primary CV symbol.
- ə unrounded half-close central vowel, as in second syllable of some Sc. English pronunciations of *after*; not official CV symbol.
- ɐ unrounded half-open central vowel, as in first syllable of RP *about*; 'float' symbol (sometimes called *shewa* /ʃə'wa/).
- ɛ unrounded half-open front vowel, as in *get*; primary CV symbol.
- ɜ unrounded half-open central vowel, as in RP *earth*; not official CV symbol.
- ɞ rounded half-open central vowel, as in some RP pronunciations of *world*; Amharic *wər*, 'month'; Swedish *föra*, 'to lead'; not official CV symbol.
- f voiceless labio-dental fricative, as in *far*.
- ɟ voiced palatal plosive as in Hungarian *egy*, 'one'.
- g voiced velar plosive, as in *gun*.
- ɠ voiced uvular plosive, as in Persian *tʃonga:zi* 'when the judge'.
- h represents a series of voiceless vowels, as in *heel*, *hill*, *ham*, *whom*.
- ħ voiceless pharyngeal fricative, as in Arabic *ħamala*, 'carried'.
- ɦ represents a series of breathy-voiced vowels, as in Czech *hlas*, 'voice', and in some RP pronunciations of e.g. *behave*.
- ɥ voiced lip-rounded labial-palatal approximant, as in French *huit*.
- i unrounded close front vowel, as in *see*; primary CV symbol.
- ɪ unrounded close front vowel, as in *fill*; 'float' symbol.
- ɨ unrounded close central vowel, as in Amharic *giβ*, 'goal'; Russian *sin*, 'son'; CV symbol.

Phonetic Symbols

- j voiced palatal approximant, as in *yes*.
- k voiceless velar plosive, as in *cow*.
- l voiced alveolar lateral, as in *law*.
- ɭ voiceless alveolar fricative lateral, as in Welsh *llan*, 'church'.
- m voiced bilabial nasal, as in *mow*.
- u unrounded close back vowel, as in Scots Gaelic *aon*, 'one'; Rumanian *gît*, 'neck'; Vietnamese *cù*, 'advance'; secondary CV symbol.
- n voiced alveolar nasal, as in *now*.
- ɲ voiced palatal nasal, as in Italian *segno*, 'sign'.
- ŋ voiced velar nasal, as in *sing*.
- ɳ voiced retroflex nasal, as in Swedish *korn*, 'grain'; Malayalam *enṇa*, 'oil'.
- ɲ voiced uvular nasal, as in Eskimo *anut*, 'male person'.
- o rounded half-close back vowel, as in Sc. English *rope*; French *peau*, 'skin'; German *Not*, 'need'; primary CV symbol.
- ɔ rounded half-close central vowel, as in Swedish *upp*, 'up', not official CV symbol.
- o rounded half-close front vowel, as in German *Söhne*, 'sons'; French *deux*, 'two'; secondary CV symbol.
- œ rounded half-open front vowel, as in German *Götter*, 'gods'; French *peur*, 'fear'; secondary CV symbol.
- ɔ rounded closish back vowel, as in General American and RP *pull*; 'float' symbol.
- ɸ voiceless bilabial fricative, as in Japanese *ɸukku*, 'to blow'.
- p voiceless bilabial plosive, as in *paw*.
- q voiceless uvular plosive as in Arabic (not Egyptian) *qalb*, 'heart'.
- r voiced alveolar trill as in Spanish *red*, 'net'; Italian *burro*, 'butter'.
- ɾ voiced alveolar tap, as in Spanish *pero*, 'but'; South African English *bread*: some Sc. English pronunciations of *red*, *for*; sometimes in RP *over-eat*.
- ɽ voiced retroflex flap, as in Hindi *gaṛi*, 'cart'.
- ʀ voiced alveolar fricative-trill, as in Czech *řeka*, 'river'.
- ɻ voiced post-alveolar fricative, as in some Sc. English *bread*; as approximant symbol, as in RP *red*.
- ɻ voiced retroflex approximant, as in Amer. English *string*.
- ʁ voiced uvular trill, as in French cabaret singer's pronunciation of *rouge*, 'red'.
- Ɂ voiced uvular fricative, as in Persian *bəxɑ:zi*, 'to the judge', Parisian French *rouge*.
- ɸ voiceless alveolar fricative, as in *see*.
- ʃ voiceless palato-alveolar fricative, as in *she*.
- ʂ voiceless retroflex fricative, as in Swedish *kors*, 'cross'.
- ɬ voiceless alveolar plosive, as in *tea*.
- ɭ voiceless retroflex plosive, as in Hindi *āṭa* 'flour'; Swedish *fart*, 'speed'.
- ʈ alveolar ejective, as in Amharic *ajit* 'rat'.
- u rounded close back vowel, as in *fool*: primary CV symbol.
- u rounded close central vowel, as in Norwegian *hus*, 'house'; Amharic *wul*, 'agreement': some Sc. English *look*.

Phonetic Symbols

- v voiced labio-dental fricative, as in *vow*.
- ʌ unrounded half-open back vowel, as in *but*; secondary CV symbol.
- w voiced lip-rounded labial-velar approximant, as in *wail*.
- ʍ voiceless lip-rounded velarised bilabial fricative, as in Sc. English *whale*.
- x voiceless velar fricative, as in Sc. English *loch*; German *Buch*, 'book'.
- χ voiceless uvular fricative, as in French *prêtre*, 'priest'.
- y rounded close front vowel, as in French *pur*, 'pure'; German *für*, 'for'; secondary CV symbol.
- ʎ voiced palatal lateral, as in Italian *figlio*, 'son'.
- ʏ voiced velar fricative, as in Scots Gaelic *dhomh*, 'to me'; Spanish *luego*, 'place'.
- z voiced alveolar fricative, as in *zoo*.
- ʒ voiced alveolo-palatal fricative, as in Polish *źle*, 'badly'.
- ʒ voiced palato-alveolar fricative, as in *leisure*.
- ʐ voiced retroflex fricative, as in Pekingese Chinese 'ʒən', 'man'.
- ʊ unrounded half-close back vowel, as in Vietnamese *o*, 'remain'.
- θ voiceless dental fricative, as in *thigh*.
- ʔ glottal stop, as in German *geöffnet*, 'opened'; Arabic *alʔamir*, 'the prince'.
- ŋ, ɲ, etc. are consonants with dental (not alveolar) articulation.
- ɲ, ɳ, etc. are palatalised consonants.
- ɳ, ɴ, etc. are velarised consonants.
- ə, ɐ, etc. are vowel sounds closer than those of the cardinal vowel symbols.
- ə, ɐ, etc. are voiceless vowels or consonants.
- ˈ marks stress where necessary and is written before the stressed syllable, as in English *in'spekt* or *in'spect*.
- ˌ is written where necessary under a syllabic consonant or vowel, as in some English *'batɳ*, RP *'stɔ:tɳ*.
- ː marks a silent stress.
- : long vowel or consonant.
- half-long vowel or consonant.

For the explanation of technical terms, see Chapter 7.

Terms Used in Traditional Grammar

accidence : the study of the various word-endings used in declensions and conjugations.

active : see *voice*.

adjective : a word such as *good, turbulent, gustatory*; often defined as a word which modifies or describes a noun. Closed subsets of adjectives include *interrogative* adjectives: in English *which* and *what* (e.g. *Which bird killed Cock Robin?*); *demonstrative* adjectives: *this, these*, etc. (e.g. *This chair is uncomfortable*); *possessive* adjectives: *my, your*, etc. (e.g. *Your tiny hand is frozen*); and the *relative* adjective *which* (e.g. *The Dean resigned, which action was very welcome*).

adverb : a word such as *often, almost, peremptorily*; often defined as a word which modifies or describes a verb, adjective or preposition.

article : in English there are two: the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a* or *an*.

aspect : see *tense*.

case : a factor in the variant forms of a noun, pronoun or adjective in a declension.

clause : a group of words containing a verb but nevertheless not forming a sentence, e.g. *because he was too honest*.

complement : e.g. in *His grandmother was elected president* and *His grandmother was in full possession of her faculties*, the terms *president* and *in full possession of her faculties* are the complements of *was elected* and *was* respectively; often defined as the word or phrase used to complete the meaning of another word or phrase.

conjugation : the set of all the variant forms of an individual verb, expressing differences of number, person, tense, mood and voice, e.g. in Latin *amo* 'I love', *amabimini* 'you (pl.) will be loved', *amaverimus* 'we shall have loved'. The total number of such forms in Latin is about 100.

conjunction : a word such as *and, but, when, unless*; often defined as a word which links other words, phrases or sentences.

declension : the set of all the variant forms of an individual noun, pronoun or adjective, e.g. in Latin :

glis : 'a dormouse'. *glires* : 'dormice'.

nominative case, usually denotes the subject of a sentence.

glis : 'oh dormouse!'. *glires* : 'oh dormice'.

vocative case, used when addressing someone or something.

glirem : 'a dormouse'. *glires* : 'dormice'.

accusative case, often denotes the object of a sentence.

Terms Used in Traditional Grammar

gliris : 'of a dormouse'. *glirium* : 'of dormice'.

genitive case, usually denotes the possessor of something.

gliri : 'to a dormouse'. *gliribus* : 'to dormice'.

dative case, often denotes the recipient in a transaction.

glire : 'by a dormouse'. *gliribus* : 'by dormice'.

ablative case, often denotes an instrument of an action.

There are five main declensional patterns in Latin; not one of these has a distinctive ending for every case. Almost every case carries a wider range of uses than indicated above.

gender : a factor in the declension of adjectives; e.g. Latin *magnus honor* 'great honour' is *masculine*; *magna arbor* 'large tree' is *feminine*; *magnum cor* 'big heart' is *neuter*. Since this declensional variation is dependent on the noun which the adjective modifies, gender is posited as a feature of nouns: therefore *honor* is said to be masculine, *arbor* feminine, and *cor* neuter. Pronouns may show the gender of nouns which they 'replace', so *hic*, *haec* and *hoc* may respectively replace *honor*, *arbor* and *cor*. A similar situation is seen in English *he*, *she* and *it*.

gerund : in English certain words ending in *-ing*, e.g. in *Drinking tea makes one ill*; it functions as a noun in being the subject of *makes* but also as a verb in taking the object *tea*.

interjection : a word such as *oh*, *ouch*, *wow*; often defined as an exclamatory word which indicates emotion.

intransitive : see *verb*.

mood : a factor in the conjugation of a verb, e.g. in Latin *amare* 'to love' is *infinitive mood*; *amat* 'he is loving' is *indicative mood*; *amet* is *subjunctive mood* appearing automatically after certain conjunctions or by itself meaning 'let him love!'; *ama* is *imperative mood*, giving the command 'love!'

noun : a word such as *hatter*, *hare*, *tea-pot*, *erudition*, *recitation*, *Alice*, *Mafeking*; often defined as the name of a person, animal, place or thing.

number : a factor in declensions or conjugations, e.g. in Latin the *singular* number very often indicates 'one' (e.g. *glis* 'a dormouse'; *dormiebat* 'it was sleeping') and the *plural* number very often indicates 'more than one' (e.g. *glires* 'dormice'; *dormiebant* 'they were sleeping').

object : e.g. in *Kenneth ate the bun* and *Kenneth gave his sister the bun* the words *the bun* represent the object (or *direct object*), often defined as the word or phrase designating the person or thing to which an action is directed; *his sister* is sometimes called the *indirect object*, defined as the recipient or beneficiary of an action.

participle : e.g. *smiling* in *The duke was smiling* and *The smiling duke spoke* (a *present participle active*) or *lost* in *The purse has been lost* and *The lost purse has turned up* (a *past participle passive*); often defined as a verbal form which has adjectival characteristics.

passive : see *voice*.

person : a factor in verbal conjugations and in pronouns. The *first person* is defined as referring to the speaker, e.g. Latin *nato* 'I am swimming'.

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ego 'I'; the *second* person as referring to the hearer, e.g. *natas* 'You are swimming'. *tu* 'you (sg.)'; and the *third* person as referring to the person spoken about, e.g. *natai* 'he is swimming', *ille* 'that man' or 'he'.

phrase : e.g. *the facts, under the bed, my old English manservant*; may be defined as a sequence of words which forms some sort of a coherent group but does not contain a verb.

predicate : everything (apart from any words in the vocative case) in a sentence which is not the subject; e.g. *was late, skidded, contained the lecturer and his wife, was found abandoned* are all predicates of those sentences which have *The taxi* as subject; it may be defined as what we say about the subject, or as the word or group of words that affirms or negates a property, condition or action of the subject of the sentence.

preposition : a word such as *above, under, to, with, from*; defined as a word placed in front of a noun or pronoun to show its relation to other words in the sentence.

pronoun : e.g. personal pronouns *I, you, he, she, it, we, they*; interrogative pronouns *who?* (e.g. *Who killed Cock Robin?*), *what?*; demonstrative pronouns *this, that* (e.g. *That was not my wife*); relative pronouns *who, which* (e.g. *Sheila, who paints landscapes, also sings exquisitely*); possessive pronouns *mine, yours, etc.*, e.g. *That armchair is mine*; often defined as a word used to replace a noun.

sentence : a sequence of words such as *Babylon the great is fallen*; often defined as a group of words which makes complete sense, sometimes with the condition that it must contain a verb. Actually to define *sentence* in a way which does not beg questions or which is not immediately circular is extraordinarily difficult, perhaps impossible.

subject : e.g. the words *The taxi* in *The taxi was late, The taxi skidded, The taxi contained the lecturer and his wife, The taxi was found abandoned*; defined as the person or thing which is spoken about, or the agent performing the action (if the verb is active), or the person or thing on whom the action is performed (if the verb is passive).

syntax : the study of how words are put together in phrases, clauses and sentences.

tense : is a factor in conjugations which refers to the time of the action described relative to the moment of description. Latin has six tenses, namely *present rideo* 'I am laughing', *imperfect ridebam* 'I was laughing' or 'I used to laugh'; *future ridebo* 'I shall laugh'; *perfect risi* 'I have laughed' or 'I laughed'; *pluperfect riseram* 'I had laughed'; *future perfect risero* 'I shall have laughed'. The first three convey an *imperfect aspect* since they do not indicate the *end* of the action denoted by the verb, the last two express a *perfect aspect* since the end of the action is clearly indicated; the form *risi* is therefore ambiguous, as the English translation shows. The systems of tense and aspect vary greatly from language to language.

transitive : see *verb*.

verb : a word such as *is, seems, laughs, smokes, makes*; often defined as a type of word which expresses an action, process, state, condition or

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mode of existence. *Transitive* verbs are followed by a direct object (e.g. *loves* in *David loves cheese*); *intransitive* are not (e.g. *snores* in *Matilda snores loudly*).

verbal noun : sometimes applied to e.g. *poisoning* in *The poisoning of the Principal remained an unsolved mystery*. It is 'more of a noun' than the gerund, since preceded by *the* and followed by *of*.

voice : a factor in conjugations, e.g. in Latin *mordeo* 'I am biting' is *active* voice, *mordeor* 'I am being bitten' is *passive* voice; it may be defined as the category which expresses whether the subject of the verb is the agent of the action (active) or whether it is the target of the action (passive).

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1. Introduction

To define in one sentence an area of study so that one explains something of its nature may be impossible: what could be a short, *informative* definition of mathematics, chemistry or philosophy? Linguistics is such a subject. We can only offer a definition and then enlarge upon it; the remainder of this book is an expansion of the statement that linguistics is the study of human language according to certain principles developed during this century.¹

Linguistics is sometimes defined as the 'scientific study' of language, but there is no point in using 'science' or 'scientific' in this context without a clear idea of what these words mean. We omit from this book all discussion of whether linguistics, or any area within it, may be regarded as a science; such a discussion requires some knowledge of linguistics and an agreed definition of 'science', for opinions vary about the meaning of this tricky word. Admittedly, in Chapter 6 we quote the defining characteristics of a science, as understood by one distinguished linguist; but not everyone would agree with his views.

An area of study passes through historical stages. During each stage most practitioners are in general agreement about the object of the study, about the general aims of it and the methods employed, and about the problems that remain to be solved. Each period may of course have its share of 'non-conformists'.²

Any period is, according to its own standards, just as 'reasonable' as any later one, and it may interpret phenomena equally well. In the Ptolemaic ('sun revolves round earth') view of the universe, the rising of the sun may be predicted as precisely as in the Copernican ('earth revolves round sun'). In the absence of a telescope, how could we choose between these theories? Indeed, for limited purposes, an earlier and simpler view may be retained without disadvantage: it does no harm to regard electricity as 'something flowing from positive to negative' when we are wiring a circuit or fitting plugs. Moreover, no theory can be shown to be 'true' even though it is of immense practical utility and interprets many phenomena; it may always be superseded by another that interprets more. For example, Newton's system of physics (in the light of which the great technological developments of the nineteenth