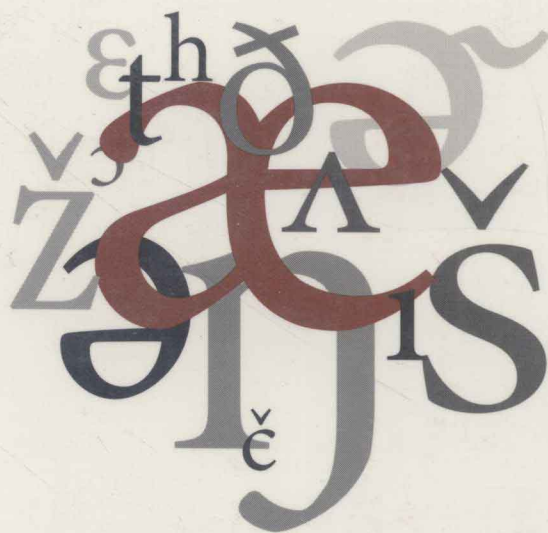


Relevant
Linguistics
*An Introduction to the
Structure and Use of English
for Teachers*

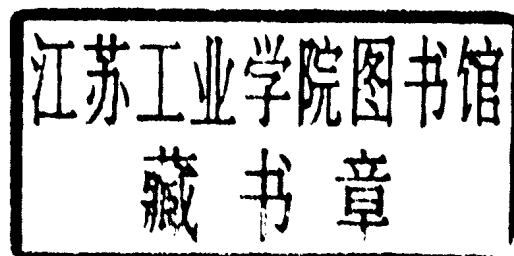


Paul W. Justice

Relevant Linguistics

*An Introduction to the
Structure and Use of English
for Teachers*

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Preface

To the Student

As more and more institutions of higher learning realize the importance of linguistics in teacher preparation programs, linguistics courses are becoming a more integral part of their curriculum. You're reading this book because you're in a linguistics class, and you're probably in a linguistics class because your school feels that an understanding of language will help you be a better teacher. Unfortunately, you probably haven't taken a linguistics class before, so you probably have no idea what linguistics is all about or how it will help you be a better teacher. Hopefully, by the end of the term, this will change.

For many first time students of linguistics, the subject is inaccessible, boring, and seemingly irrelevant. The purpose of this textbook is to make linguistics more accessible, more interesting and more obviously relevant to you. It has been written with future teachers in mind. While it's not a teaching handbook, it does highlight areas of linguistics that are most relevant to teachers, occasionally even making specific suggestions for applications of the material to classroom teaching. In most cases, however, the specific applications will be up to you, the creative teacher, to identify.

For those neither in, nor pursuing, a career in education, this book will hopefully provide an accessible introduction to linguistic study, which will give you valuable insight into human language and prepare you for future study in the field.

To the Instructor

This textbook is based on many semesters of tried and true methods and materials. Every semester at San Diego State University there are seven or more sections of an introductory class that is populated largely by current and future elementary and secondary school teachers. Our goal is to teach them about the structure and use of language, with an emphasis on English, the language of instruction in most of their classrooms. The various instructors of this class have tried many different textbooks and have received repeated complaints from students about all of them. Some students say the books are incomprehensible; others say they are filled with an excessive amount of jargon, and others still don't see the connection between the material in the book and their chosen profession. The aim of this book is to eliminate, or at least reduce, these complaints by making linguistics more accessible and relevant. This text does not claim to be better than those currently in use; it merely claims to be more appropriate (and effective) for a particular group of students.

The approach this book takes is, of course, very descriptive in nature. The goal is to impress upon students the systematic nature of language and the scientific nature of linguistic inquiry. The text is data driven, with copious examples provided throughout. The idea is to lead students through descriptive analyses and help them really "see" the concepts as well as to provide them with reference materials that they can refer to when studying for tests or, better yet, preparing their own lessons or deciding how to address a classroom situation.

The data and examples used are mostly from English. When foreign language data is used, it is for the purpose of illustrating the differences between English and other languages. The purpose of these comparisons is to make students aware that there is nothing inherently "normal" about the way English works and that students from non-English speaking backgrounds have difficulty with English for very understandable reasons—the same reasons native English speakers have difficulty with other languages. Also, this focus on English tends to make the material seem more relevant to the students and, therefore, captures their attention better.

One issue to keep in mind when using this textbook is what can be referred to as the struggle between completeness and simplicity. That is, as teachers, we want to present our students with complete information about the structure and use of language, but at the same time, because language is so amazingly complex, we are sometimes forced to simplify it to make it more comprehensible to our students. At times, this text does this. Also at times, the sharper students catch the oversimplifications. Rather than apologize for it, an instructor can explain to them why the material has been simplified and invite them to continue searching for more "complete" answers to their questions.

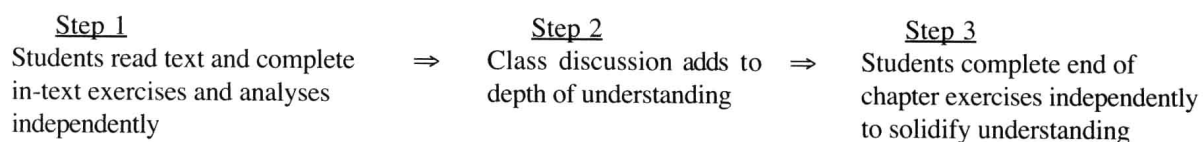
Many of these oversimplifications appear in Chapter Six. Students tend to get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of material in a study of syntax, the result being that difficult choices must be made regarding how detailed the approach should be. Because of this, the approach to syntax in this chapter is greatly simplified in places. For example, in the presentation of phrase structure, certain kinds of words are not included at all. A quick glance reveals that adverbs, while covered at the beginning of the chapter, do not make an appearance in the phrase structure sections. Also in this section, the approach to constituents is simplified. For example, noun phrases are represented with the simplified structure *det+adj+N*, rather than a structure that indicates grouping at different hierarchical levels. This is one of several simplifications that have been made with regard to phrase structure. Another feature that has been simplified is the treatment of “that” as a relative pronoun. While this word is generally regarded as a complementizer, not a relative pronoun, among linguists, such a presentation does not work well with the student population this book is written for. The philosophy behind this text is to teach as much about the structure and use of English as possible without going so far that students tune out.

On a related note, while this text walks students through the basics of linguistic analysis in a very thorough way, you will find that it does not always delve as deeply as possible into some issues. That is, many of the gray areas of linguistics are not dealt with. For example, in the chapter on morphology, compounding is dealt with in a brief paragraph, while the topic could easily be discussed over several pages. The intended audience of this book often complains that detailed discussions serve only to confuse them and erect barriers between them and the material. This book *does* cover these gray areas, to a certain extent, because they are an essential part of the discipline, but not completely because some of the details are probably better dealt with in class. In fact, one of the main benefits of this book is, hopefully, that it will free up class time to discuss these complex issues by covering the basics in the text in a comprehensible way.

Also, while the chapters are presented in a particular order, from the smallest units of language to larger ones, there is a certain amount of flexibility in terms of the order in which the chapters can be used. For example, the chapter on morphology could be covered before the chapters on phonetics and phonology. Another possibility that has been effective in the past is to handle phonology and morphophonology together, after both the phonetics and morphology chapters. However, given the way the information on word classes is split between the morphology and syntax chapters, it's probably best to cover syntax later, as the syntax chapter assumes knowledge of the material covered in the morphology chapter. Also, the final chapter on language variation assumes knowledge of all of the material presented earlier. It serves to introduce important new concepts while reviewing familiar ones. Thus, it is most effective when covered at the end of the term.

Finally, understanding the pedagogical plan behind the book can help instructors decide how best to work with it. The philosophy behind this curriculum is that students learn best in class when they have a foundation of knowledge and skills to work with. Thus, it's recommended that students be assigned readings to be completed *before* the class session that will cover that particular area. Also important for establishing this foundation is completion of the quick exercises and data analyses in the text of each chapter. These can be used to lead into class discussions and involve students in those discussions. The other two components of the pedagogical philosophy are a thorough exploration of each area during class and independent practice through the completion of the end of chapter exercises *after* class. No solutions to these exercises are provided in the book, so instructors who want to use them as graded exercises can do so. For those instructors who do not want to use them as graded exercises, solutions are available via the Web and can be distributed to students. Only instructors who adopt the text will have access to these solutions. To obtain access, please contact the publisher by email at pubs@csli.stanford.edu or by FAX at 650-725-2166. Please provide proof of text adoption and make your request on university letterhead.

The graphic below illustrates the pedagogical philosophy.



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I'd like to thank all the people who helped make this project possible. First, I'm grateful to my family for providing me the best educational opportunities from a young age and for stressing the importance of education throughout my life.

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Paul Justice
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What is Linguistics?

In this chapter, we'll examine the discipline of linguistics to prepare you for the term. In addition to defining what linguistics *is*, we'll examine what it is *not*. In the process of doing this, we'll identify some of the more common, and important, misconceptions about linguistics.

Some specific goals of this text are the following:

- To encourage you to reevaluate your own beliefs and attitudes about language.
- To make you aware of the complexity of language and able to articulate this awareness.
- To make you aware of some of the similarities and difference among languages.
- To expose you to the “core” sub-fields of linguistics (phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax).
- To introduce you to linguistic analysis, and to encourage you to think scientifically about language
- To provide you with some tools that you can apply in subsequent study of linguistics or professional settings.

Some important fundamental concepts of linguistics are stated below (adapted from Department of Linguistics, pp. 2–3):

- Every language is amazingly complex.
- Despite this complexity, all languages are highly systematic, though their systematicity is not transparent to native speakers of those languages.
- It is not easy for speakers of a language to think about or talk about their language use; although our speech is completely rule governed, we are not consciously aware of these rules.
- Speech is the primary mode of language; writing is only a secondary one. For proof of this, just think about the age at which you started speaking and the age at which you started reading and writing.
- Although most children learn their first language fluently by the age of five, they're not explicitly taught it; instead, they naturally acquire the rules of their language from the language use they hear around them.
- Linguists are interested in describing the similarities and differences among languages; this is especially important when trying to teach someone a second language.

What Do Linguists Do?

When people meet a teacher of linguistics, the first question they generally ask is “how many languages do you speak?” This question perfectly illustrates the fact that most people have very little idea what linguistics is all about. It also illustrates one of the most pervasive misconceptions about the discipline:

Misconception #1: Linguistics is the study of specific languages with the goal of learning to read, write or speak them.

If this were true, every linguist would speak a variety of languages fluently; otherwise, they'd be pretty poor linguists. Imagine the surprise, however, when people meet a linguist who speaks only a single language. This does *not* mean, however, that such individuals are linguistically deficient. While these linguists

don't speak any languages other than English, they know a fair amount *about* many other languages. Put another way, they don't know them (i.e., speak them), but they do know about them. This is an important distinction to make. It also leads us to a working definition of linguistics:

Clarification #1: Linguistics is the scientific study of the phenomenon of human language.

There are some important, yet seemingly subtle, points wrapped up in this definition. First, note the form of the word "language." If it were to read "languages," then the misinformed souls referred to earlier would be correct. Rather than studying specific languages, linguists study the "phenomenon" of language, in terms of its structure and use. We use this word "phenomenon" in our definition not to make it unnecessarily wordy, but to clarify and reconfirm the notion of the larger issue of human language, rather than specific languages, as the primary focus of linguistics. You can think of human language as one big system, with each individual language being a specific part of the system. This concept is illustrated in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1: Human Language

Also important is the use of the word "scientific" in the definition. Throughout our exploration of the phenomenon of language, we will employ a scientific approach, similar to the "scientific method" you learned in grade school. That is, we will *observe* real language, we will make *hypotheses* about it, and then we will *test* our hypotheses to see if they're accurate. In the end we will describe "laws" of language in much the same way a physicist describes laws of nature. We'll explore the nature of language "laws" (i.e. rules) in more detail shortly.

A final note to make here is the *mode* of language that we will be dealing with primarily. At all times, unless otherwise specified, when we discuss language, it will be *spoken* language that we are referring to. The *written* mode will also be covered, but when this is the case, a special note will be made.

What is the Nature of Language?

Now that we have defined linguistics as the scientific study of language, we need to spend some time discussing what language is. This is not as simple as one might think. Most people, when asked to define language, focus on the concept of communication. They come up with definitions for language such as "a way to communicate thoughts and ideas." It's true that language is a tool for communication, but to offer such a simple definition would be misleading. The fact of the matter is that language is far more complex than most people realize. Consider the following example:

- (1) Jimmy says to Joey: "Hey, what's up?"

What thoughts or ideas have actually been communicated to Joey? Most people agree that the idea communicated by questions is a request for information. For example, if someone asks you "What time is it?" they're communicating to you that they would like some information, namely the time of day. In (1), however, do you think Jimmy really wants information from Joey? How do you think he will react if Joey really starts to tell him what's up (generally understood to mean what's happening in his life)? If Jimmy is like most people, he'll get bored rather quickly. He'll also probably make a mental note never to ask Joey that kind of question again. Instead, he'll probably just say something like (2) and keep on walking.

(2) "Hey, Joey, good to see you."

And why is this statement an easy substitute for the question in (1)? The answer is simple: because (2) conveys essentially the same "information and ideas" as (1), namely a greeting. In some cases, we use language not to express ideas or communicate information, but to perform social functions such as greetings. Expressions like the question in (1) are intended solely to perform social functions and do not really contain any other "meaning." Performing a social function is not the same as "conveying information."

To further dismiss the simplified communication-oriented definition of language, consider example (3):

(3) Man says to woman at a bar: "You look lovely tonight."

Now, presumably it's possible that he merely wants to express an idea in his head, give her that information and be done with the interaction. However, most people would probably suspect that this man has an ulterior motive, and that by telling her she looks lovely, he may be able to influence her actions. In fact, it's entirely possible that he doesn't really believe this "idea" that he's expressed to her, yet he expresses it anyway. Why? Perhaps he believes a compliment is going to help him achieve some other purpose (we'll leave the exact nature of that purpose to your imagination). So, we see that in the case of some compliments, the use of language goes beyond the desire to "convey information."

The important point to get out of the preceding discussion is that language is far more complex than we realize. In fact, it's so complex that it's difficult to provide a nice, neat, concise definition of it. Instead of *defining* language, then, we'll *describe* it. We can describe language as a complex system involving ideas and expressions. Stated another way, when we use language, we put thoughts (ideas) into words (the expressions). Thought this might seem straight-forward at first, upon closer inspection, we'll see that it's actually more complicated.

Let's begin with the link between ideas and expressions. Is it always as tight as we'd like it to be? In other words, do we always say exactly what we mean? Certainly not. Any teenager who has ever planned a telephone call to an admired boy or girl knows this well. No matter how much they rehearse exactly what they want to say, it never seems to come out as they had hoped. This problem connecting ideas and expressions is what leads countless teenagers (and adults) to jot down notes before making important phone calls to line up dates.

To further illustrate the complexity of language, we have to consider the situation in which utter expressions. The fact of the matter is that a single set of expressions can have multiple meanings depending on the situation in which utter them. In other words, the ideas (or meaning) represented by our words is, at least to a certain extent, context specific. Consider (4) and (5):

(4) Teacher asks students in the back of a large lecture hall: "Is Zoe there?"

(5) X says to Y, who has just answered X's telephone call: "Is Zoe there?"

In (4), the teacher is expressing his desire for information, specifically whether a certain person is present in the classroom or not. If the students reply "yes," then the questioner is satisfied and the discussion moves on to other matters. In (5), however, if Y answers "yes" and hangs up, X won't be as satisfied as the teacher. This is because the expressions in (5), though identical to the expressions in (4), are used to express a different meaning (i.e. there is a different idea behind it). In (5), the meaning goes beyond a request for information about the presence of a person and includes a request to actually speak with the person. Thus, we see that, in some cases, the situation in which an expression is uttered can change its meaning. This is, indeed, complicated.

Focus on Expressions: The Nature of Words

An important point to raise when discussing language is the nature of the words we use to express ideas. The words we use are **signs** of our meaning, but what is it about them that makes their meaning clear? Consider the words in 6:

(6) water, agua, su

Even if you don't recognize the third word, you can probably guess what it means based on the other two words. All three of these words are used to represent the meaning of H₂O in different languages —“agua” is the Spanish word for water, and “su” is the Turkish word for water. Notice, however, that while they have the same meaning behind them, the words are completely different on the surface. That is, they don't sound alike at all. If there were some inherent connection between the words we use and their meanings, then every language would use the exact same words. This, however, is certainly not true. There is nothing inherent in the sounds w-a-t-e-r or a-g-u-a that indicates the meaning of these words. Instead, English's use of w-a-t-e-r, Spanish's use of a-g-u-a, and Turkish's use of s-u are completely *arbitrary*. This is illustrated by the fact that these different languages have different words for H₂O, yet all three of the words represent the same meaning to speakers of the languages. Our understanding of “water” as H₂O is based only on our agreement, as English speakers, that we will use the sign “water” to represent this meaning. People who do not speak a word of English, however, are not in on this agreement, and cannot connect the sign word with the meaning H₂O. The point here is that most words are completely arbitrary.

While the overwhelming majority of words in any language are completely arbitrary signs, like the words in (6), there are some words that do, at least in some way, indicate their meaning. The most obvious examples are like those in (7):

(7) meow, moo

The words we use to represent animal noises generally sound somewhat, though not exactly, like the actual noises. Thus, unlike the words in (6), there is some inherent connection between the words in (7) and their meanings. It is not an arbitrary choice to use “meow” for a cat's noise and “moo” for a cow's. Instead, the choice is based on something real in the world. Specifically, the pronunciation of the word is similar to its meaning, the sound it represents. Words like the ones in (7) are examples of **onomatopoeia**. Onomatopoeic words are ones that do, in some way, indicate their meaning. These words, therefore, are *not* completely arbitrary signs.

Further evidence for onomatopoeic words not being completely arbitrary comes from other languages. For example, if you ask people who speak other languages what the word for a cat's noise is in their language, chances are that the word will be similar to the English “meow.” This makes sense, because the word is, after all, onomatopoeic. Table 1.1 provides cross-linguistic examples of onomatopoeia.

<u>meaning</u>	<u>English word</u>	<u>Arabic</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Japanese</u>
cat's sound	meeyow	mowmow	mayow	neeyow
rooster's sound	cockadoodledoo	keekeekees	coocoo	kohkaykoko

Table 1.1: Onomatopoeic Words (adapted from the Department of Linguistics, p. 16)

What you should notice is that the words, while similar across all the languages, are not identical. In fact, it's impossible to find a word that is universal to all languages. If one were to exist, it would be a completely non-arbitrary sign, and such signs simply do not exist in human language. In other words, there are no completely non-arbitrary words in language. For completely non-arbitrary signs, we need to look to nature. For example, the presence of smoke is a completely non-arbitrary sign that there is fire in some form. No language, however, has such signs.

So, you're probably wondering at this point how a system with so much arbitrariness can work. The answer lies in the word “system.” Language is not just a bunch of words thrown together; instead, it's very

systematic, and when native speakers of a language speak their own language, they unconsciously follow a set of complicated rules. This set of rules is often referred to as **grammar**, a word that often evokes painful memories for some people. In the next section, we will explore the nature of these grammar rules.

The Nature of Grammar Rules: Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism

Perhaps one of the reasons people have negative feelings toward grammar is the approach to grammar that is generally taken in schools. Specifically, grammar is presented as a set of rigid rules that must be followed by anyone who wants to be considered a “good” or “correct” speaker of a language. Naturally, any approach of this nature sets people up for failure if they do not conform exactly to the standard that’s been set. It’s no wonder, then, that many people grow up disliking grammar. No doubt, people’s early experiences with grammar have contributed significantly to the second misconception:

Misconception #2: Linguistics is concerned with trying to get people to speak “properly”.

Linguistics teachers hear this from students all the time. Often students report that by taking a linguistics class they hope to learn to speak “better” English. Their assumption is that this is the purpose of a linguistics course. This is certainly not the case. Rather than *prescribe* to students how they should speak a language, linguistics is mainly concerned with *describing* how people actually speak. This distinction is generally referred to as **prescriptivism** vs. **descriptivism**.

Prescriptivism

As the term suggests, someone who subscribes to a prescriptive approach to grammar, believes that there is a prescribed (written before, or ahead of time) list of rules to which all speakers of a language must conform. Those who do not conform are said to be speaking “incorrectly” and in some cases are labeled “linguistically deficient.” It’s understandable that many people take this view of grammar. After all, this is the approach taken in most language instruction. A quick glance at any foreign language textbook confirms this. Chapters usually begin with the statement of a rule. This prescribed rule is then modeled using a variety of examples. After that, there are exercises for the students to practice the rule that they’ve learned. This is clearly a prescriptive approach.

Prescriptivism is not, however, limited to the foreign language classroom. You’ve probably learned many prescriptive rules of English during the course of your education, most of them in English or composition classes. The “rules” in (8) represent two of the more common prescriptive rules of English.

- (8) a. It’s ungrammatical to end a sentence with a preposition.
- b. It’s ungrammatical to split an infinitive.

If you violate these rules, as we have in the sentences in (9), you have, in the eyes of a prescriptivist, spoken ungrammatical English.

- (9) a. Linguistics is what I live for.
- b. Captain Kirk wants to boldly go where no man (or woman) has gone before.

The problem for prescriptivists, however, is that these sentences sound perfectly good to nearly all native English speakers and sentence just like these are spoken regularly by native English speakers. We’ll address this “problem” in the next section.

Descriptivism

What you will soon see, hopefully, is that prescriptivism ignores reality. First, while formal foreign language instruction is, as has been noted, generally prescriptive, first language acquisition is clearly not. Every person reading this book learned a language fluently by the age of five, and with very few, if any, exceptions, none of you read or heard any grammar rules during this time. This list of prescribed rules that

the prescriptivist adheres to did not play a role in your acquisition of your first language. In fact, most of you probably never encountered a stated grammar rule until you were at least 12 or 13 years old.

Consider also the fact that nearly every single one of you reading this book violates the rules in (8) on a regular basis. In fact, the examples in (9) that violate these rules probably sound just fine to nearly all of us. If native speakers of English end sentences with prepositions and split infinitives regularly, who are these prescriptivists to claim that such English speakers don't know how to speak the language? This is something that we should all take exception with (note the sentence final preposition).

To further illustrate the absurdity of prescriptivism, consider the origin of prescriptive rules, in particular the prescriptive rule prohibiting the splitting of infinitives. In the eighteenth-century there was a movement among grammarians to standardize English, and when questions arose about which forms should be deemed "correct," they were often answered by using classical languages, Greek and Latin, as models¹. In Latin, infinitive forms consist of a single word. Examples are the verbs "vocare" (to call) and "vertere" (to turn). Thus, in Latin, it is impossible to split an infinitive. In English, however, infinitives consist of "to" plus the verb (as in "to turn" and "to call"), giving rise to the possibility of splitting an infinitive, such as the infinitive "to go" that's split in (9b). To attempt to make the rules of one language, English, conform to the rules of another, Latin, can only be described as absurd.

Clarification #2: Linguists are concerned with describing how people actually speak.

Rather than trying to prescribe how people *should* speak, linguists are interested in describing how they actually *do* speak. Descriptive grammar does not judge linguistic production as correct or incorrect; instead it observes what people say and describes it. Such an approach also involves surveying native speakers of a language to test their intuitions regarding what "sounds good" or "sounds bad" to them. The approach taken by a descriptivist is that whenever a native speaker of a language speaks, he or she is following a set of grammar rules. In other words, aside from the occasional slip of the tongue, all native speaker linguistic production is *100% rule governed*. The descriptive linguist is well aware, however, that not all native speakers are following the exact same set of rules. Consider the sentences in (10).

- (10) a. We love linguistics classes.
- b. *Love we classes linguistics.
- c. ?If I were you, I would take lots of linguistics classes.
- d. ?If I was you, I would take lots of linguistics classes.

No doubt you find (10a) perfectly grammatical, but you find (10b) wholly ungrammatical, and would never expect to hear any native speaker of English uttering such a sentence (an asterisk before a sentence, as in (10b), indicates ungrammaticality). It's difficult to imagine any native speaker of English disagreeing with you. What this proves is that we all share some (in fact, many) of the same rules. There is certainly to be disagreement, however, among native English speakers regarding the grammaticality of (10c) and (10d) (a question mark before a sentence indicates questionable grammaticality). For some of you, (10c) is grammatical, while (10d) is ungrammatical; for others, the exact opposite is true; for others still, both are grammatical. Does this mean that some of us are right and others are wrong? If so, who's right? To a descriptive linguist, because sentences like both (10c) and (10d) are spoken regularly by native speakers of English, they are both grammatical for the people who speak them. (10c) and (10d) prove that while all native speakers of English share certain rules, we do not share *all* rules. In fact, there is a tremendous amount of linguistic diversity among the speakers of any language. We will revisit this issue in more detail at the end of the book.

What this lack of consensus regarding grammaticality tells us is that to judge certain speakers as incorrect or deficient because they don't conform to a standard laid out by certain individuals, such as the eighteenth-century grammarians described earlier, is misguided. Linguists do not judge; they merely observe and describe. We will see that the *correct vs. incorrect* distinction is more useful than the *appropriate vs. inappropriate* distinction. That is, when speaking with people who prefer (10c) to (10d), it would be more

¹ See Barry (1998), pp. 4–5, for a more detailed discussion.