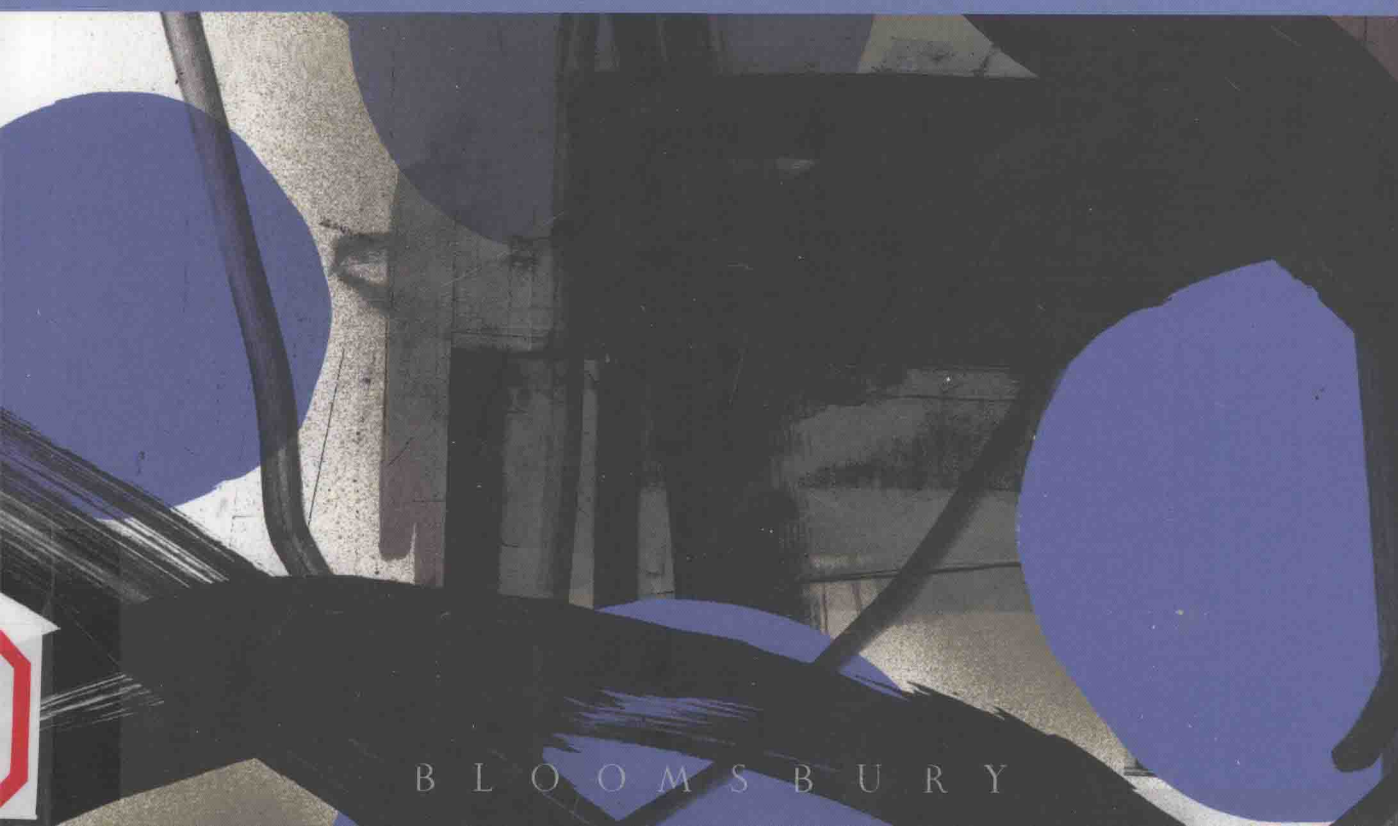
Second Edition

William B. McGregor

Linguistics

An Introduction



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Linguistics

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Preface

My intention in writing this book is to provide a basic introduction to modern linguistics that conveys an idea of the scope of the subject, and a feeling for the excitement of doing linguistics – the excitement of finding out about language and languages, including your own. I hope it will stimulate your understanding of the subject, rather than rote memorization of facts. I would also like to convey some appreciation of the reasons why linguists do what they do, and for the approaches and methods they adopt in studying languages. The third thing I would like to encourage is the development of your powers of observation, as well as your critical and creative faculties.

There are many excellent introductory textbooks on linguistics. Why another? My initial motivation lay mainly in dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the existing textbooks. None offered what I wished in terms of manner of presentation, pedagogic philosophy, the range and type of information presented and theoretical stance. As a result of teaching an introductory course in linguistics in 2002, I was convinced of the need to write my own textbook to remedy these dissatisfactions. This resulted in the first edition, published in 2009. Errors in the first edition, omission of important topics and new developments in linguistics necessitated a new edition.

Organization and presentation

Manner of presentation

This book employs a clear physical layout of information, presenting the material in brief, clear sentences and sections. Each chapter begins with a short abstract, a detailed table of contents, a list of the main goals of the chapter and a checklist of the major terms and concepts introduced. It concludes with a summary, a guide to further reading and a list of problems and issues for further thought.

The book is accompanied by a website containing additional information and a set of multiple-choice questions designed to test your understanding of the main points of each chapter. Its address is: **http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/linguistics-an-introduction-9780567583529**. Where relevant, you will be directed to this website by the mouse icon in the left or right margin.

This manner of organization should permit the book to be used not just as a textbook for a course in linguistics, but also by an independent reader wanting to find out about linguistics.

Pedagogic philosophy

My two major concerns are first to encourage and facilitate understanding linguistic concepts and how to use them, and second to promote observation of language. Thus the work aims to present not just 'facts' but also ways of dealing with them, ways of understanding them in relation to the broad issues of concern to linguistics. To this end, each chapter includes a set of questions for further thought (some easy, some quite challenging) and exercises. I believe that it is through attempting to solve simple – and difficult! – problems that students can learn and understand a subject, more so than by reflecting on larger philosophical issues.

You have to understand linguistics to do it. But at the same time, you have to do it to understand it: you have to get your hands dirty by engaging with data – grappling with it, attempting to understand it and relating it to what you already know (or think you know) about language or a language. Until you begin doing both of these, it is pointless, in my opinion, to dwell on the philosophical issues surrounding the subject, as fascinating as they may be. A part of what is especially attractive about linguistics is that there is still a lot to learn about every one of the roughly 7,000 languages spoken in the world today. Even students new to the subject can, if they are attentive to speech around them, learn something new (or not widely known) about their own languages. This I know, having seen some nice examples from students in past courses.

Not only do doing and understanding go together, but a third component is essential, namely the 'facts', the knowledge about language and languages. Notice that I said in the first paragraph of this section that my aim was to present 'not **just** "facts"'; I didn't say or suggest that facts are unimportant or uninteresting! To the contrary, the 'facts' are extremely interesting, and to ignore them would be suicidal for a linguist, as it would be for any scientist or researcher. Some chapters rely rather more heavily on facts than others.

Another aspect of understanding linguistics is to see it in a historical perspective: part of understanding why linguistics is as it is, and why linguists do things the way they do, requires an appreciation of the intellectual traditions of the subject. The introductory chapter contains a section presenting modern linguistics from a broad historical perspective; it also contains an exercise directing students to find out about particular linguists. The website for the book extends on these by presenting a brief overview of the history of the subject. I had intended to incorporate this material into Chapter 1 in this edition; however, constraints of length prevented me doing so.

Range and type of information

Many introductory textbooks focus almost exclusively on one language: English. This book also uses many examples from English, presuming that anyone who can read it will have sufficient knowledge of the language to permit it to be used as a foundation on which an understanding of concepts and arguments can be constructed. However, numerous examples are given from other languages, many 'exotic' and/or endangered, including languages I have first-hand experience of myself. Partly this is a statement that other languages are as important as English to linguistics, and indeed are crucial to the subject. These examples are also intended to encourage you to try to understand and appreciate the ways other languages do things, which can be very different from the way English does things.

Theoretical framework

Modern introductory textbooks tend either to specifically acknowledge no particular theoretical framework, purporting to be either atheoretical or catholic in orientation, or to adopt the dominant theoretical framework in linguistics, generative grammar (see §1.4). Almost no introductory textbook presents linguistics from any of the many alternative perspectives. For these other perspectives one must go to more advanced textbooks on specific topics. This book is intended to fill the lacuna and present beginning linguistics from an alternative perspective, specifically one in which meaning and use play absolutely central roles. While I have my own minority theoretical perspective, I do not attempt to present or argue it here; rather I stand back from it, and adopt a more general stance that includes many theories within the so-called functionalist and cognitivist domains. Needless to say, not all practitioners in these theories will agree with everything I say.

There are other reasons why I believe it is unhelpful to adopt a too non-partisan approach in an introductory text. It is important for beginning students to get the feel for working and thinking within one approach. This has the advantage of permitting them to go more deeply into a topic and gain 'hands-on' experience in doing things according to that approach. On the other hand, presentation of theoretical variety – perhaps chaos – tends to leave students bewildered on the one hand, and on the other, frustrated with the sketchy treatment of topics. There is also the danger that they acquire no usable skills.

Structure of the book

Aside from Chapter 1, the Introduction, which sets the scene, this book is divided into three parts. Part I, **Language: System and Structure**, consists of Chapters 2–6. These focus on the structure and system of human languages. It presents a number of central notions of modern linguistics that are essential to an understanding of the subject, both in the remainder of the book and in subsequent courses in linguistics. These chapters are fairly demanding on understanding, and you are likely to find them fairly heavy going.

> It is perfectly normal for beginning students to feel lost in the first few weeks of their introductory linguistics course: it takes time to get the 'feel' of what linguistics is all about, and to appreciate the unfamiliar ways of thinking about language. Things should start to become clearer in the second month; if not, you should consult your lecturer or the tutor.

Part II, **Language: A Human Phenomenon**, consists of Chapters 7–11. These chapters look beyond the structure of individual languages, and situate human language and languages in the wider contexts of human life and culture, including other forms of communication and other languages. The remaining five chapters, Chapters 12–16, make up Part III, **Language: Uniformity**

and Diversity. These chapters focus on variety and variation in languages: with the different 'mediums' for the expression of languages, the cross-linguistic range of variation in language structures, language change over time and the linguistic diversity of the world. You should find Parts II and III easier going conceptually, though perhaps more taxing on memory.

Parts II and III are relatively independent, and may be read or taught in either order. Both, however, presume knowledge and understanding of some of the basic notions presented in Part I. In particular, notions of the phoneme and morpheme are presumed in many places. With a little additional introductory material, or explanation of concepts as encountered, it would be possible to present Part II prior to Part I; Part III, however, demands more of the notions developed in Part I, and would be unsatisfactory prior to Part I. I teach, and have placed, Part II after Part I largely for purposes of variety, and as respite from the rather heavy-going Part I.

About the second edition

This edition corrects a number of errors in the first edition, including typos and errors of fact and interpretation, including, I am ashamed to say, a few instances where I uncritically presented widespread linguistic myths. Doubtless, other such lapses remain, and I can only ask the reader to advise me so that I can correct them in future editions. I have also updated the references in the Guide to Further Reading for each chapter, as well the discussion of some sections, especially in the final chapter on the linguistic diversity of the world (Chapter 16) and to a lesser extent the chapter on psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics (Chapter 9).

The major change in this edition is the inclusion of three new chapters. Part II has a new chapter, Chapter 8, on text and discourse. This is a revision of a chapter (Chapter 7A) previously included on the website for the book. Part III has two new chapters, Chapters 12 and 13, which deal in turn with the two alternative mediums to the auditory-vocal medium (speech), which I refer to as the visual-gestural (sign languages) and visual-inscribed (writing) respectively. I did this rather than integrate discussion of these mediums throughout the text in order to highlight the differences from speech. This is consistent with the current trend in sign language linguistics to pay attention to what is peculiar to sign languages, and what these peculiarities might tell us about the nature of human language. This represents a pendulum swing from an earlier trend to downplay the differences, and focus on the commonalities – which was motivated by a need to argue for deaf sign languages as genuine languages. This is now accepted in linguistics, and no longer needs to be argued. The addition of these two chapters necessitated some reorganization to and deletions from Chapter 1.

For a long time I was unhappy with the chapter on syntax, Chapter 5, and I had planned that the second edition would include a completely rewritten text. However, when it came to the crunch, I was unable to find a better way into the topic. Indeed, the more I thought about it, the happier I was with the approach I adopted, which begins with the fundamentals, criteria for the identification of syntactic units, and follows a logical progression to the recognition of the inadequacy of description of sentence structure in terms of these units. This leads naturally to the conclusion that grammatical relations or roles are required. Much beyond that point I do not believe it is advisable

to go in an introductory text, and to do so would force one to choose a specific grammatical theory. Partly for this reason – and partly because I don't believe it works – I have not taken the advice of Bartlett (2011: 124) and gone deeper into the Hallidayan interpretation of the interpersonal structure of the clause.

I have retained in this edition the same general theoretical stance as adopted in the first edition. The reviewer just mentioned has also commented that 'McGregor is sticking rather too rigidly to mainstream syllabuses rather than providing the radical functional and cognitivist approach promised' (Bartlett 2011: 127). I regret that my text suggested a promise for a radical functional and cognitivist approach; in fact, I never intended this. First, my own theoretical inclinations aside, I believe it is important in introductory courses on linguistics to attempt to give a feeling for the landscape of the subject. A textbook providing the suggested radical approach would be nice, but in my opinion for a non-introductory course: for students who have already been exposed to the subject. Moreover, as I see it, such a textbook would have difficulty covering fundamental topics including phonetics, phonology and morphology in a manner suitable for beginners – a bit like presenting relativity to primary school students. Nor would I like my account of the linguistic diversity of the world to be construed from such a perspective. Second, my intention was always to cater to mainstream syllabuses. Third, I have had since the early 1990s serious reservations about both functional and cognitive approaches, and with aligning myself with them. In particular, I dislike being labelled a 'functionalist', which suggests I focus more on language function than form. In my view each should be accorded equal prominence.

With the first edition of the textbook we made available to instructors a book of answers to exercises included at the end of each chapter. This was in the form of a pdf file that could be downloaded from the website for the book. This has now been expanded to reflect the new content, and is available as a booklet that can be purchased by instructors, in both hardcopy and electronic form.

Guide for the student

This book contains far too much material to be covered in a one-semester introductory course on linguistics. Your instructor will be selective in the range of chapters covered and the material from each chapter that is used. Nevertheless, my advice is to read the entire book, including the chapters not covered in your course, and the material on the accompanying website. You should of course focus more on the chapters covered in your course – but do read the others. They provide valuable additional information and perspectives on the subject.

I advise students to read and attempt to understand each chapter before the lecture on that topic. But don't get too bogged down on details. If you don't understand something after making an honest attempt at it, move on, keep reading. The lectures will present the fundamental ideas of each chapter in a different medium, orally, providing you with another chance to understand the topic.

Your lecturer or tutor can also be consulted on points you have difficulty with. But you should first make a serious attempt to understand and attempt to formulate precise questions. Your lecturer or tutor will be able to answer a specific question, though they will be hard-pushed to help

you if you can't formulate a question. It is very hard to help if you can only say you don't understand! I always advise my students to formulate at least one question about each chapter to ask me or the tutor prior to the lecture or tutorial.

Here is my advice on how to attack each chapter. Begin by examining the preliminary materials, which give an idea of the scope, contents, goals and organization of ideas in the chapter; the list of key terms highlights concepts to take particular notice of as you read the body of the chapter. With this background, read the chapter through. I would recommend first reading it rapidly, and then to go back and read it more carefully, focusing in particular on the places where you had difficulties in understanding.

After you finish reading a chapter, go back over the list of key terms, and check that they now make sense to you. If they don't, review that part of the text, and refresh your memory and understanding.

I also advise doing this after the lecture as well: that is, review what you have read. After the lecture, try to summarize the chapter in a few sentences, in your own words. Compare your summary with the summary included at the end of the chapter.

Can you answer the basic question: what is the chapter about?

Each chapter, as mentioned above, contains exercises and questions for further thought. There are too many for you to complete each week. You will need to be selective – read each question through, and select the ones that you find most interesting and attempt them first. (Don't just start at the first, and go until you run out of steam or time.) Answers are not provided – it is just too tempting to look at an answer before thinking a problem through.

One of the skills that you need to learn at university is how to be selective in what you do and think carefully about, and how to make good choices in your selections. This is a skill that you should attempt to develop over time: don't expect it to come immediately and naturally to you. One of the ways you can develop the skill is by comparing your summary of the chapter with the summary in the book. Have you focused on a minor issue? Have you identified all of the major points identified in the chapter summary?

A set of multiple-choice questions can be found on the website for the book. The idea of these is to test your understanding of the main ideas of each chapter. You should also attempt these each week to keep track of your progress. Feedback is provided at the completion of the test, when you submit your responses. Your overall performance is indicated, and specific comments are provided on each of the questions you got wrong. The questions have been revised in the present edition in order to make them more accessible to non-native speakers of English; all 'trick questions' have been removed.

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What else should you read? Each chapter contains a list of further readings on the topics covered. No one expects you to read all of these things: that would take you much longer than the course. The references are mentioned for your information, for you to follow up if you are especially interested in some topic. (Here again you need to develop your skills in selectivity.) This could be after the course, perhaps even at a later time in your linguistic studies. Glancing over this section of the chapter may also alert you to some issues not dealt with in the text, or only briefly dealt with.

Sometimes reading another treatment of a topic will assist your understanding of it; but if you have difficulty in understanding something, take the advice given above, rather than attempt to read about it in a dozen different books – as likely as not you will still not understand!

I am certainly not discouraging you from reading. What I do discourage is reading as a replacement to thinking. Reading should be, rather, an enhancement to your thinking. Read as much additional material as you can find the time for, focusing in particular on those issues that most interest you or are most relevant to your course.

I am sometimes asked, 'What do I need to remember?' This is a difficult question to answer. As indicated above, I consider understanding the subject more important than rote memorization of facts. Understanding, however, also involves memory, and if you understand a particular point, you will want to remember the general drift of ideas leading up to it, even if you don't remember every tiny detail. The general patterns are much more important to remember than the details; specific minor details you can find by referring to this or some other book. But think about it! The less you remember, the more you need to rely on finding or re-finding the information. Imagine if every time you added 2 and 3 you had to work it out from first principles, on your fingers, or with the calculator app on your phone or tablet. This would be more than a little impractical when you go shopping.

My advice is that you should remember the main concepts – i.e. both the terms and their meanings – given at the beginning of each chapter. These are notions that are likely to be used in later chapters, lectures and other courses. If you have to look them up every time you encounter them, your understanding will be seriously impaired.

On studying linguistics I recommend Bauer (2007), a handbook for students that provides much practical information and advice, including advice on fundamental notions and conventions, reading linguistics, and writing essays. Wray and Bloomer (2012) also provides valuable information and advice to students on doing research on linguistics, including essay writing. These works will be particularly useful to those who intend to continue studying linguistics. The website for this book also contains my advice on essay writing.

Århus, April 2014

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The videos of American Sign Language (ASL) included on the accompanying website are courtesy of the National Center for Sign Language and Gestures Resources at Boston University (directors Carol Neidle and Stan Sclaroff). Thanks also to the signer, Lana Cook, for permission to use this video, and Carol Neidle for useful assistance and advice. Credits for graphical and other materials are given in the captions.

Thanks also to my editors at Bloomsbury, Gurdeep Mattu and Andrew Wardell, for their patience with an extremely slow author and their prompt responses to my requests, often not reciprocated, and to Anders K. Madsen for constructing and revising the accompanying website.

Abbreviations and Conventions Used in Examples

I have avoided using abbreviations as far as possible, in most cases restricting them to glosses in example sentences, and occasionally for cited forms of morphemes in the text. Just a few of the technical terms used in the text are abbreviated; these are not included in the list below, but can be found in the Glossary at the end of the book.

Following the normal practice of sign language linguistics, I have – in the text and examples of Chapter 12 – adopted the convention of representing morphemes of sign languages by their English gloss, given in capitals. Many sign languages are commonly referred to by acronyms – e.g. ASL for American Sign Language. These abbreviated labels are specified on the first mention of the language name.

The following is a list of the main abbreviations used in the example sentences. Where possible they follow the recommendations of the Leipzig glossing rules: conventions for interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses, available online at http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php. In a few cases an abbreviation has more than one different interpretation; it should be obvious from context which is intended.

ABS absolutive (case of object and transitive subject)

ACC accusative (object case)

ACT active (case of active participant)

AdjP adjectival phrase

AdvP adverbial phrase

APP applicative ('do with [something]')

AUX auxiliary

C clause; consonant

CL classifier

COMP complementiser (like *that* in *think that X*)

DAT dative ('for')

DEC declarative

DET determiner

ERG ergative (case of transitive subject)

FUT future

GER gerund

INACT inactive (case of an inactive participant)

IND indicative

INTER interrogative word

IO indirect object (e.g. recipient)

IRR irrealis ('didn't or mightn't happen')

MAS masculine (gender of nouns referring to things classified like male human beings)

N noun, nominal

NEUT neuter (gender of nouns referring to things)

NF non-finite

NOM nominative (case of transitive and intransitive subjects)

NP noun phrase

NPST non-past (present or future)

O object (grammatical relation)

OBJ object case form

OBL oblique form (i.e. a case form other than nominative or accusative)

P phrase

PART participial

PFV perfective

PL plural ('many')

POSS possessive

PP prepositional phrase; postpositional phrase

PROG progressive

PRF perfect

PRS present

PST past

REL relative clause marker (e.g. *who*, as in *the woman who saw it*)

RPST recent/past

S subject (grammatical relation)

SG singular ('one')

SUB subject case form

SUBJ subjunctive ('it is hoped or wished that')

TR transitive

V verb; vowel

VOL volitional ('to want to do something')

VP verb phrase

1 first person ('I', 'we')

2 second person ('you')

3 third person ('he', 'she', 'it', 'they')

* ungrammatical or unacceptable sentence in syntax; proto-form in historical linguistics

? questionable expression

- morpheme boundary

= beginning of an overlapping stretch of speech

→ acting on

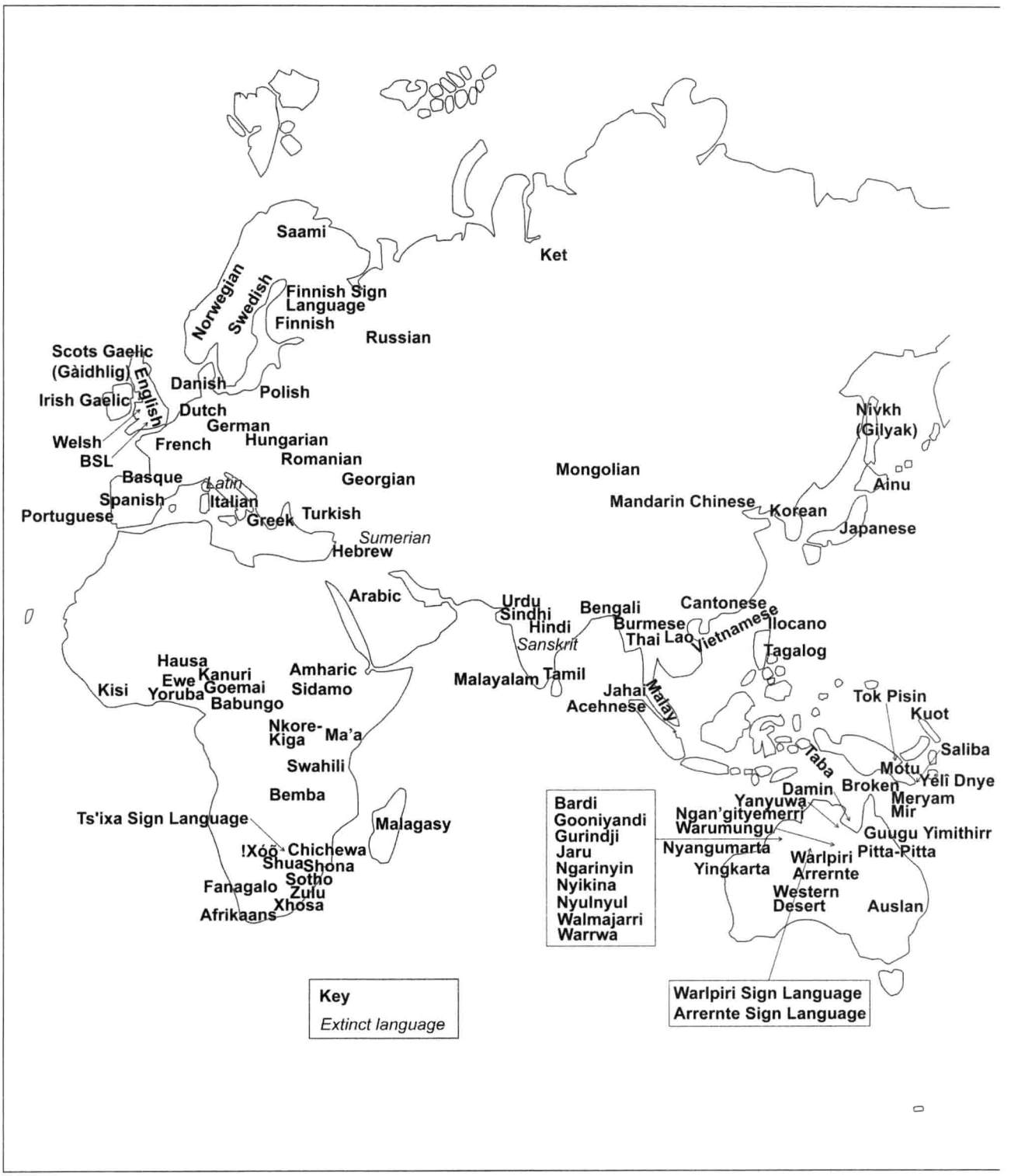
(x.y) a pause of x.y seconds

(.) a pause of less than 0.2 second

[ ] phonetic representation

/ / phonemic representation

< > graphemic (written) representation



Map 1 Approximate homeland locations of main languages mentioned in this book.

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