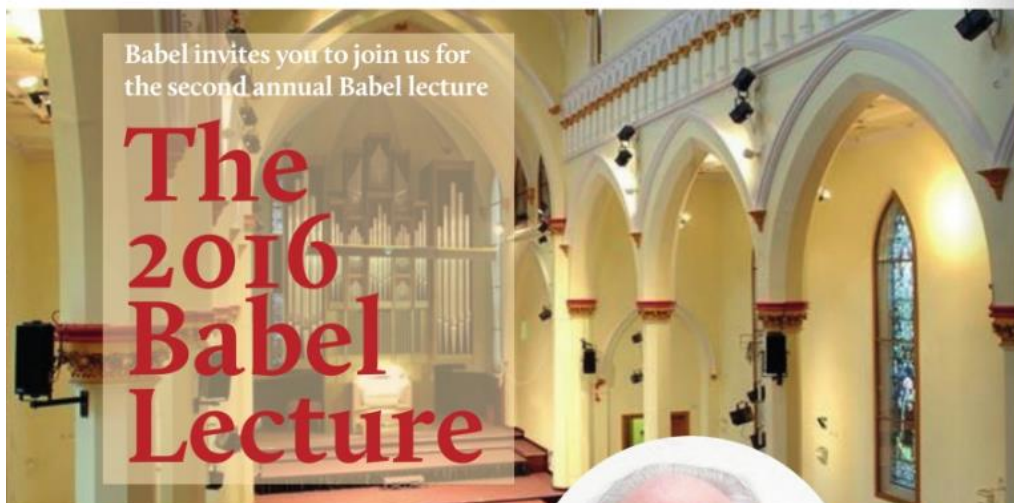


Friday 13 May,
7.30pm at St Paul's Hall,
University of Huddersfield

Babel

The Language Magazine



Babel invites you to join us for
the second annual Babel lecture

The 2016 Babel Lecture

David Crystal presents 'The English tone of voice'



Join us at the University of Huddersfield's beautiful St Paul's Hall for a celebration of language and linguistics.

David Crystal – linguist, academic, and Babel's Linguistic Consultant – will be marking the occasion with a public lecture on the English tone of voice. Exploring this neglected dimension of the English sound system, Crystal will discuss how although we do not usually associate phonetics with sex, spies, and Star Wars, these worlds are unavoidable when we carry out a linguistic analysis of tone of voice.

This FREE event is open to the public and Babel readers are warmly welcomed. Please book your place by contacting editors@babelzine.com (put BABEL LECTURE in the subject bar).

University of
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Feature What kind of linguist are you?

Dividing up the field of linguistics

By **Martin Edwardes**, Visiting Lecturer,
King's College London

What is linguistics? A simple – and complete – definition is that it is the study of language; but this definition only raises a new question, what is language? And it is with the definition of language that the arguments about linguistics begin.

There are many, often contradictory, ways to define language. Is it something already in our heads when we are born, a capacity that is activated by encountering other people using language, but which requires no teaching? Or is it a way of communicating we can only learn from others, not activated but positively taught? The answers we give to these questions dictate how we think about language, and how we should react around young people – and to our own children.

Or perhaps it is the uniqueness of language that intrigues us. Is language a special human-only system which is self-contained and unlike anything else in nature? Or is it just the practical use of other aspects of cognition and communication, many (or all) of which can be seen in the cognition and communication of other animals? The answers to these

questions tell us how we see language itself: is it amazingly different and strange, or is it a link to the rest of nature? And they also tell us how we see our own species: amazingly different and strange, or just part of nature?

There is also the dual role of language as a way of communicating and as a way of thinking. It seems very likely that having language has given us new ways of thinking about the world; but did language start as cognitive and then become communicative, or was it the other way around? There are compelling arguments for both sides. On the one hand, most of our language happens inside our heads; only a small fraction comes out through our mouths; so language is clearly mostly cognitive. On the other hand, when we use language inside our heads we are holding an inner conversation with ourselves; we couldn't have this inner dialogue unless we were already aware of language as a communication system.

Currently, we do not have definitive answers to any of



these questions – and there are linguists who take positions on each side of these three fences. We can describe the different approaches to these questions as **isms**, systems or practices which emerge from a particular set of personal beliefs – and the many linguistic theories do all seem to end in –ism!

Over the page you will be able to discover your own linguistics ism. Remember that this quiz is for fun! It does not give a complete list of isms in linguistics, nor does it cover all the discussions that are going on. You don't need an ism to be a good linguist; but it is useful to know how people around you may be thinking, and why they may be thinking what they are thinking. ♣

Pull-out What kind of linguist are you?

Pull-out poster What kind of linguist am I?

A fun quiz to help you find your linguistics ism.

(There are no right answers, only answers!)

CHOOSE YOUR THREE ANSWERS AND FOLLOW THE TRAILS TO YOUR ISM

A Which of these two statements represents your view of language best?

B Which of these two statements represents your view of language best?

C Which of these two statements represents your view of language best?

A1 Language is mostly already in our heads when we are born. We have language because we have a language-ready brain.

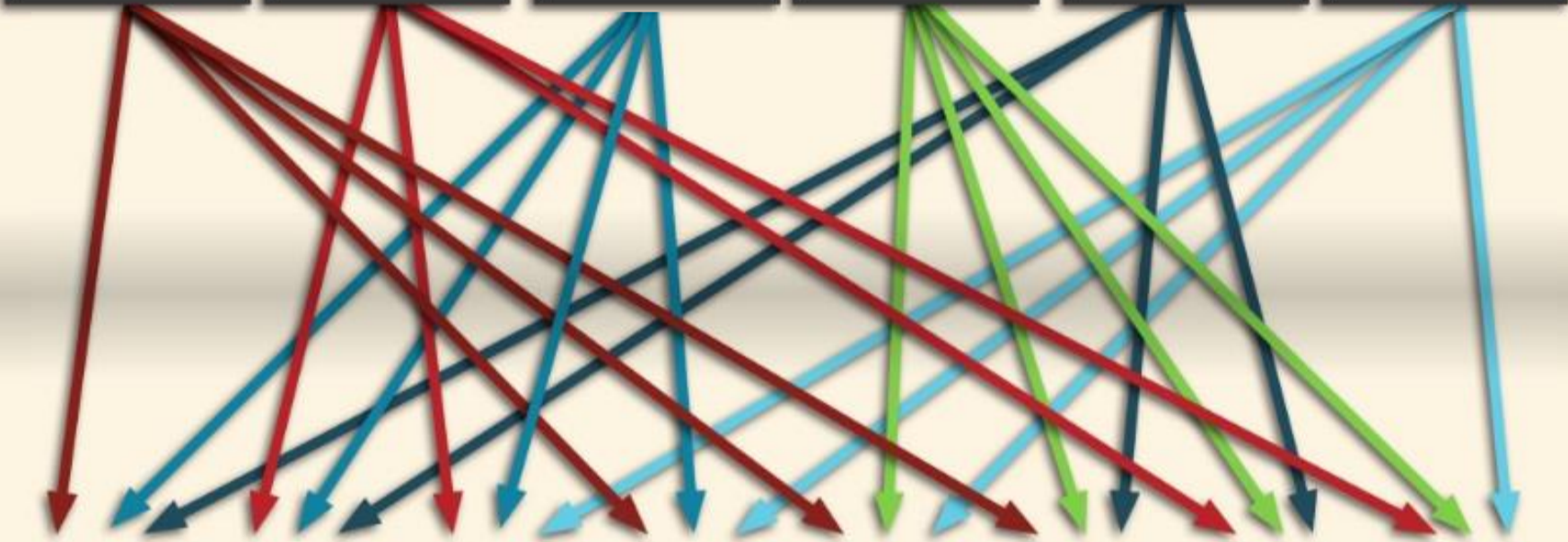
A2 Language is mostly learned from other people. We only have language because we have to work together with other humans.

B1 Language is something only humans have, no other animal has a signalling system anything like it.

B2 Simpler versions of many of the components of human language can be found in the signalling systems of other animals.

C1 Language is mostly about thought. It is mainly used for thinking, and only a small fraction is used for speaking and listening.

C2 Language is mostly about communication. Although it can be used for thinking, its main purpose is speaking and listening.



A1 B1 C1 YOU ARE A GENERATIVIST Linguist-of-choice: Noam Chomsky Gemstone: Ceramic Lucky number: zero Lucky day: Sunday	A2 B1 C1 YOU ARE A ... FUNCTIONALIST Linguist-of-choice: Michael Halliday Gemstone: Bluetack Lucky number: 3, 4 or 5 Lucky day: Saturday	A2 B1 C2 YOU ARE A ... PRAGMATIST Linguist-of-choice: Talmy Givón Gemstone: Melamine Lucky number: x+y Lucky day: Friday	A1 B1 C2 YOU ARE A ... STRUCTURALIST Linguist-of-choice: Ferdinand de Saussure Gemstone: Brick Lucky number: pi Lucky day: Thursday	A1 B2 C2 YOU ARE A ...SOCIO-COGNITIVIST Linguist-of-choice: Rod Ellis Gemstone: Wood Lucky number: Some Lucky day: Tuesday	A1 B2 C1 YOU ARE A ... COGNITIVIST Linguist-of-choice: George Lakoff Gemstone: Brain Coral Lucky number: √2 Lucky day: Wednesday	A2 B2 C1 YOU ARE A ... DISTRIBUTIONIST Linguist-of-choice: Stephen Cowley Gemstone: Flint Lucky number: The Golden Mean Lucky day: Monday	A2 B2 C2 YOU ARE AN ... INTEGRATIONIST Linguist-of-choice: Roy Harris Gemstone: Ice Lucky number: zi Lucky day: None, days are just semantic constructs
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MORE SERIOUSLY: For generativists, the key features of language are grammar and syntax – the capacity to use rules in the production of signals, allowing us to combine meanings into novel, propositional meanings. These rules are the product of innate, peculiarly human, cognitive systems which are dedicated to language. Linguistics should be the scientific study of language as a universal cognitive phenomenon. Social applications of language are distractions, not real linguistics.	MORE SERIOUSLY: Functionalism is mainly interested in describing language as used rather than language as a concept. There are several forms of functionalism (e.g. lexical functionalism, Danish functionalism, axiomatic functionalism), but the most common is systemic functionalism. In SF, language has three, four, or five systematic clusters of function (or metafunctions): textual, interpersonal and ideational, with the ideational further divided into experiential and logical metafunctions.	MORE SERIOUSLY: Pragmatists see language as a set of ad hoc conventions, heavily overlaid with more primitive signalling systems. What is meant and understood is much more important than what is said, or how. Meaning is not expressed just in the language used but in the whole utterance experience, the physical context, the social context, and the cultural context. Language is specifically human, but that is no more significant than saying that gannets communicate in a specifically gannet way.	MORE SERIOUSLY: This is largely a historical discipline, a product of Ferdinand de Saussure's work. It takes the view that language is the exchange of signifiers (meanings) about signifieds (things) through the medium of signs. Structuralism was an approach used in many areas of science in the early 20th century, but it was later seen as too mechanistic: most systems consist of both structures and processes. Structuralism remains significant in computational linguistics.	MORE SERIOUSLY: Socio-cognitivism is interested in language as a social phenomenon. Language may originate in brains, but its purpose is in the world. Our communicative needs dictate form and content, and are what is interesting about language. While socio-cognitivism itself has few adherents, sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists are advocates of this approach (but not anthropological linguists, who are cognitivists). Socio-cognitivism is more an approach than a school of thought.	MORE SERIOUSLY: For cognitivists, while language systems are natural for humans, they have a basis in non-human systems – you can see examples of language-like capacities scattered throughout nature; and, while language is communicative, it is based on embodied representations in the brain. The way we work in the world determines the forms of language we use: language is applying thinking rather than just thinking, but it is still about thought.	MORE SERIOUSLY: Distributionists believe that humans live in an information system – it is in them and around them. Linguistics is a way of accessing that information system. Distributionists talk of language as a process of cognition, not a structure (hence the verb languaging is used instead of the noun language), but cognition itself need not involve just a single brain. Languaging allows brains to network, handling information in ways that single brains cannot manage.	MORE SERIOUSLY: There is no rule-based system of language for integrationists, language is a convenient term to describe how humans communicate together. Integrationism is largely a protest against rule-based approaches to language, but it does have considerable value in narrative analysis and stylistics. It is a relatively old discipline, and it has a small but dedicated band of followers.
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ARE ALL THESE ISMS A BAD THING?

Pull-out What kind of linguist are you?

Should we be surprised that there are so many, sometimes contradictory, ways to do linguistics? Surely if linguistics is a scientific search for answers then we should by now have some agreed ideas about how language works, what it does, and how we should understand it; but it seems that we have not even agreed on a common definition of language! Does this mean that linguistics is not yet thorough enough to be called a science?

A science can be defined as a body of knowledge which is systematically related to the real world – if the body of knowledge cannot show itself to be both systematic and related to the real world, then it is not science. For instance, homeopathy is systematic, but it relies on ideas about ‘water memory’ which can only be related to the real world by an act of faith. There is no provable evidence of water memory other than ‘it works (except when it doesn’t)’. On the other hand, beauty is clearly related to the real world – we know a beautiful sunset

when we see one, and can even identify aspects of this sunset which make it more beautiful than yesterday’s sunset; but those aspects of beauty are not systematic. The particular shade of red that makes a sunset so spectacular can be terrifying when seen in a forest fire.

So do the isms of linguistics show that it is systematic and real, or not? If we look at Physics (the King of Sciences) then we can see similar controversies on basic matters (and the basics of matter). Is the Universe composed of 11 (or 13) dimensions, with most of the dimensions curled up tight and virtually inaccessible to the knowable four dimensions? This is the weird world of string theory, a mathematically coherent explanation of matter which nonetheless is currently unprovable in the real world. Or what of quantum theory? This explains many features of the Universe, but it contains inconsistencies which seem to indicate that physical reality only occurs when measurement happens; without measurement,

reality is a set of superimposed probability (or quantum) states.

It is the debates about the nature of language that makes linguistics a science. We may not yet have answers, but we do know where we should look for them. We constantly test our ideas against the real world of language use, and we also constantly try to build our ideas into more general theories; and our search is not blind: we do know what will count as proof or disproof for our theories.

As Marcus Aurelius reminded us, “Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth.” Yet we can move towards the truth in linguistics if we weigh the different opinions against each other, and identify the most coherent perspectives. We need isms in linguistics because comparative opinion backed by physical evidence is the only way to do good science. ¶

Martin Edwards is the author of *The Origins of Grammar: An Anthropological Perspective*. He lectures at King’s College London on a range of courses and modules. His BA module, ‘The Making of Language’, has an unusual assignment: you have to create your own language!

Book

If you would like to learn more about some of the controversies of linguistics, you may be interested in: Vyvyan Evans (2014) *The Language Myth: Why Language Is Not an Instinct*, Cambridge University Press.

Lives in language



Bas Aarts explains why the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen was such an influential grammarian of English.

Otto Jespersen 1860–1943

Did you know that many grammars of the English language were written by non-native speakers during the early twentieth century?

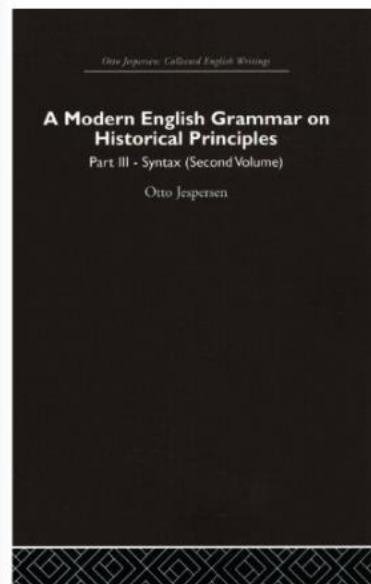
The best known grammars are Etsko Kruisinga’s *A Handbook of Present-Day English* (1909–32), Hendrik Poutsma’s *A Grammar of Late Modern English* (1904–29), and Otto Jespersen’s *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (1909–49).

What’s remarkable about these grammars is that they are huge, and that they were published in several volumes. One reason for their bulkiness was that their authors used thousands of examples from literary texts to illustrate points of grammar. These days we would say that these works were corpus-based, i.e. based on large collections of texts called corpora. Just think how much work collecting these examples involved for the scholars who wrote these grammars. Not only did they have to trawl through countless works of literature published over a large span of time to find them, they also had to record the examples by copying them by hand onto slips of paper or by using a traditional typewriter. They then had to devise a sensible filing system to ensure that the data could be retrieved easily. This typically involved using old shoeboxes. And they had to do all this before

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they could begin writing the grammars themselves. In our computer age it’s hard to imagine that collecting data could have been so time-consuming for scholars.

It is generally agreed that of all the grammarians mentioned above Jespersen was the greatest. He was born on 16 July 1860 in Randers, eastern Jutland, Denmark. As a student



Part III of Jespersen’s encyclopedic work on English grammar.