

615:101

Introduction to the Study of
Language

1/2005

Registration Issues

If you are not registered and hope to get a special permission number, you should talk to the TA responsible for the section you wish to register for.

If you are registered and wish to change sections, you must get a special permission number for the new section, as above.

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<http://www.rulinguistics101.org/>

Slides discussed in each lecture will be posted at the site immediately before or immediately after the lecture.

Homework assignments will be posted at the site, normally on Fridays. They are normally due the following Wednesday.

Solutions to assignments will be posted after the assignments have been handed in.

<http://www.rulinguistics101.org/>

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This week and next

1. Reading
LF 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2
2. Assignment #1
Due on Wednesday in class
See the website under SCHEDULE

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Assignments

- There will be 11 assignments in total
- The lowest grade will be dropped, so your best 10 assignments will count for your grade.

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Classroom expectations

- Attendance is required.
It will occasionally be checked in lectures through various means.

In sections, your instructor may take attendance on a regular basis.

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Classroom Expectations

- If you choose not to attend a lecture you are still responsible for the content.
- Be courteous. You may not arrive late, and you may not leave early.

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Rules and Dialects

- Rules we know about as speakers: **descriptive rules.**
- Rules which dictate how we are supposed to speak: **prescriptive rules .**

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I/me rule:

Pronoun is subject	Pronoun is object	Pronoun is after a Preposition
I saw a man	A man saw me	A man spoke to me
He saw a woman	A woman saw him	A woman spoke to him
She saw a man	A man saw her	A man spoke to her
We saw a man	A man saw us	A man spoke to us

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Every speaker of English agrees:

Grammatical	Ungrammatical
I saw a man	* Me saw a man
A man saw me	*A man saw I
A man spoke to me	*A man spoke to I

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What is the rule?

- Subjects are nominative (*I, he, she...*), every other pronoun is accusative (*me, him, her...*)
- (Very common kind of rule in languages)
- Note – a **subject** precedes the verb in English and the verb “agrees” with it: it changes its form depending on what the subject is: **I see** him, He **sees** me.

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Descriptive Rules

- Every English speaker unconsciously commands this rule, completely.
- No doubts or hesitations.
- The rule **describes** what speakers know about the language, just by virtue of growing up as an English speaker.

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A different kind of rule

- What happens in sentences where the pronoun comes after the verb “be”?
- The descriptive rule we just formulated predicts **me, him** etc. Because these are not subjects. (Remember: subjects precede the verb in English)

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Our descriptive grammar predicts:

Grammatical	Ungrammatical
It was me	*It was I

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But there is another factor here: we are taught in school that we **should say I, he**

Grammatical	Ungrammatical
It was I	*It was me

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Differences between the descriptive rule and the prescriptive rule

1. We are explicitly taught the prescriptive rule, not the descriptive rule.
2. Speakers systematically follow descriptive rules, but not prescriptive.

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The prescriptive rule predicts

Grammatical	Ungrammatical
It was just we	*It was just us

But no speaker EVER says “It was just we”.
It sounds completely ridiculous

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3. Following the prescriptive rules has a social interpretation: we think it makes us sound “educated” or as if we belong to a socially prestigious group. Following a descriptive rule just makes us speak English

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4. Prescriptive rules are often based on the grammar of **another** language (or on someone's idea of the grammar of another language!), Usually Latin.

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Announcement

- Assignment 1 is due on Wednesday. Bring it to class. You will need to have a quick look at LF 1.4 for the assignment.
- Print it from the website:
<http://rulinguistics101.org>

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Reading

- Reading for today LF 2.1, 2.2

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Question: How many of you speak a dialect?

Answer: All of you

A dialect is a **variety of a language that is shared by a group of speakers**. It is impossible to speak a language without speaking at least one dialect of it.

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Why are some dialects regarded as better than others?

Two hypotheses:

- **Social**: dialects are regarded as better if they are spoken by a socially prestigious groups.
- **Linguistic**: dialects are regarded as better if they have better rules (e.g. More "logical", consistent ...), or more rules.

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my-self	my book
your-self	your book
her-self	her book

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What is the rule for forming pronoun-self forms?

1. Find the pronoun form which occurs before a noun (the “possessive” form)
2. Add *-self* to this form of the pronoun

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What does the descriptive rule predict for *him+self*??

his-self	his book
*him-self	*him book

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Plural pronouns work the same way:

our-selves	our book
your-selves	your book

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So the rule predicts:

their-selves	their book
*them-selves	*them book

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Conclusion

the “his-self/their-selves” dialect is:
 more regular
 more “logical”
 than the “him-self/them-selves” dialect.

Therefore the linguistic hypothesis predicts that the “his-self/their-selves” dialect should be regarded as prestigious.

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Evidence such as this supports the conclusion that the different perceived status of standard and non-standard dialects is not due to their grammars being inherently better or worse but due to the social prestige of their speakers.

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Goal for the semester

Learn enough about how languages work to be able to disentangle issues of social prestige from issues of grammar.

Study how linguistic rules really work.

Study variation in linguistic systems.

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