



# Introduction to Modern Linguistics

## Traditional Grammar versus Modern Linguistics



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# Learning objectives

**In this lecture, students will be introduced to the History of Modern Linguistics: Structuralism and modern schools of linguistics after the review of traditional grammar.**



## Traditional Grammar versus Modern Linguistics

**Traditional grammar** (also known as classical grammar) is a framework for the description of the structure of a language. It refers to the collection of **prescriptive rules** and concepts about the structure of language that is taught at school.

**Modern linguistics** refers to the **scientific study of language and its structure**. This includes the **study of features such as grammar, syntax, and phonetics**.

The main difference between traditional grammar and modern linguistics is that the former is **prescriptive** while the latter is **descriptive**.

## Difference between Traditional Grammar and Modern Linguistics

Most traditional grammarians considered the **written** form as the most important aspect of language; however, **modern linguists** considered **speech** as the most important aspect of language.

Moreover, traditional grammar attempted to **force** language into a **Latin-based framework**, but modern linguists **do not judge one language by the standards of another**.

**Traditional grammar** is initially based on **European languages particularly on Greek and Latin**, therefore, it describes phrases and sentences based on established categories of Latin and Greek whereas **modern linguistics is descriptive**.



## Prescriptive Grammar

- based on **European languages particularly on Greek and Latin**
- specifies **how a language should be used** and **what grammar rules should be followed.**
- implies a distinction between "**good grammar**" and "**bad grammar,**"
- and its primary focus is on **standard forms of grammar and syntactic constructions**

## Descriptive Grammar

- Doesn't force one language into the framework of another.
- a study of a language, its structure, and its **rules as they are used in daily life by its speakers from all walks of life, including standard and nonstandard varieties**
- **non-judgmental**, and it does not have the goal of determining what represents good or bad language



# History of Modern Linguistics

The **earliest linguistic traditions** arose **in antiquity**, in societies with established traditions of writing.

whereas **modern linguistics** emerged in **the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries** with the shift of focus from historical concerns of changes in language over time to the idea that language can be seen as a self-contained and structured system situated at a particular time.



The Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure( 1857-1913) is widely acknowledged as a key figure and the founding father of modern linguistics.



Structuralism in linguistics examines how the elements of language relate to each other in the present.

He considered that **a language is a system in which all the elements fit together, and which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others.**

His students reconstructed his ideas from his lecture notes and published them in 1916 as *Cours de Linguistique Générale* ( *course of general linguistics* )

## Modern Schools of Linguistics

The modern schools of linguistics that emerged in the twentieth century include the structuralism school, the functional school and the mentalist school led by Ferdinand de Saussure and Leonard Bloomfield, M.A.K Halliday and John Searl and Noam Chomsky respectively

### Schools of linguistics

- **The structuralist school**
    - Ferdinand de Saussure, Leonard Bloomfield.
    - language is a structure that can be studied independently from other aspects of human behavior.
  - **The functionalist school**
    - M.A.K Halliday, John Searl
    - Both structure and function must be taken into account to understand the nature of language.
  - **The mentalist school**
    - Noam Chomsky
      - “Primarily, I am intrigued by the possibility of learning something from the study of language, that will bring to light inherent properties of the human mind”.
- Noam Chomsky.



Here are four of the most well-known linguistic schools of thought:

### **Structuralism:**

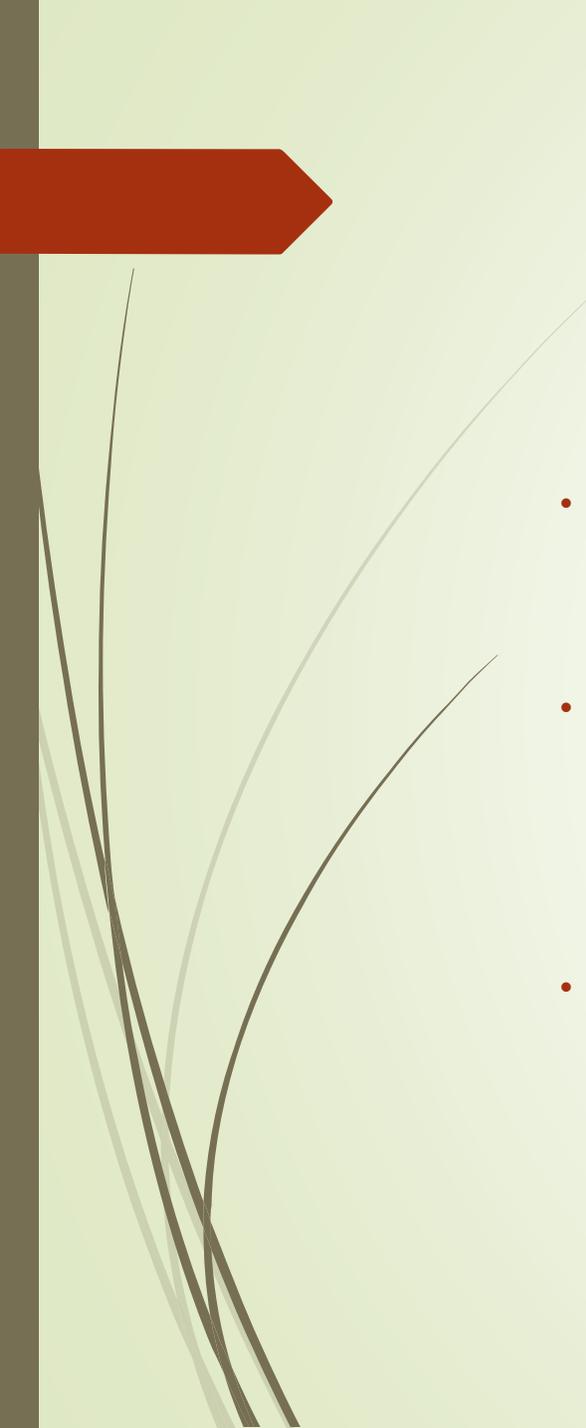
Several schools of 20th-century linguistics committed to the structuralist principle that a language is a self-contained relational structure, the elements of which derive their existence and their value from their distribution and oppositions in texts or discourse.

Saussurean structuralism was further developed in somewhat different directions of other European movements.



In the United States the term structuralism, or structural linguistics, has had much the same sense as it has had in Europe in relation to the work of Franz Boas (1858–1942) and Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and their followers. Nowadays, however, it is commonly used, in a narrower sense, to refer to the so-called post-Bloomfieldian school of language analysis that follows the methods of Leonard Bloomfield, developed after 1930.

Phonology (the study of sound systems) and morphology (the study of word structure) are their primary fields of interest. Little work on semantics has been done by structural linguists because of their belief that the field is too difficult or elusive to describe.

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- **Functionalism.** This first school of thought focuses on how language is actually used in everyday life. ...
  - **Generativism:** Generative grammars do not merely distinguish the grammatical sentence of a language from ungrammatical sequences of words of the same language; they also provide a structural description, or syntactic analysis, for each of the grammatical sentences.
  - **Cognitivism:** Cognitivism in linguistics refers to how language is learned, and how language plays a role in forming our thoughts and other mental processes. Cognitive linguistics combines linguistics and psychology and looks at how language affects cognition or thought formation.



## References

- ▶ Yule, George 2010. The Study of Language. Fourth edition. Cambridge: University Press.
  - ▶ Link: <https://www.coursesidekick.com/linguistics/16036360>
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