

Ahoy there! Whether it's to decode ancient tongues or to analyse a stranger's blabberings, I'll help you as your guide to navigate through the peculiar depths of linguistics.

You'll find I'm a book of few words. By all means, don't hesitate to use other online tools at your disposal to further your search!

Phonology

All spoken languages possess a range of sounds. Some sounds are present in many languages, some are rarer to find. A standardised way to notate the same sound across all languages is with the **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)**, which theoretically notates all possible sounds. This is what you would observe in a dictionary.

[insert table]

Consonants are categorised into **place** (in the mouth) and **manner** of articulation (when pronouncing); vowels into **height**, **backness** (in mouth cavity) and **roundedness** (of lips).

Besides learning to pronounce sounds, these categories assist linguists in determining likely **sound changes**. When two words/parts of words merge to construct something new, neighbouring sounds may **assimilate** and shift closer to each other, which may be observed through their respective categories becoming more similar.

E.g. in- + -possible = impossible, not *impossible*.

<https://www.ipachart.com/>

Morphology

Most languages possess some mechanism to build new words from existing ones, either by adding new words, prefixes, or suffixes.

Some languages have **inflection**, where the word's core meaning remains but modifying the word communicates additional contextual information, or where this reaffirms information already included in the sentence. This information can be sorted into grammatical categories, such as the **case, number, person, tense, aspect, evidentiality, etc.**

E.g. The sheep run. vs The sheep run-s.

There are various ways to modify a word. Some languages add prefixes or suffixes, but others may also use **infixes, reduplication**, or vowel alternation (**ablaut**); or perhaps employing a combination of the above. In certain cases, a single modification alone can communicate several categories of information.

Syntax

The order in which you arrange the words in a sentence may also be critical to its meaning and validity, governed by the language's **syntax**. Most languages contain a default preset sequence of where the **subject, verb and object** should appear in a sentence, although some are more flexible. For instance, English abides by a strict **Subject-Verb-Object (SVO)** pattern.

Historical Linguistics

Languages are observed to gradually and continuously change over time, which may be through generally systematic **sound changes**, or steadily replacing vocabulary by **borrowing** from other languages. This may result in languages diverging and branching into many daughter languages, forming a family tree.

To trace clues in determining a language's genealogy, a linguist may compare the vocabulary and grammar of two or more languages hypothesised to be related, known as the **comparative method**. As processes such as sound changes tend to be systematic and apply throughout the language, linguists may use this to determine the relative genetic distance between languages. Linguistic research may be used along with archaeological and genetic findings to reconstruct an accurate historical record.