An Introduction to Language

EIGHTH EDITION

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In memory of Victoria Fromkin and Peter Ladefoged

About the Authors

Victoria Fromkin received her bachelor's degree in economics from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1944 and her M.A. and Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1963 and 1965, respectively. She was a member of the faculty of the UCLA Department of Linguistics from 1966 until her death in 2000, and served as its chair from 1972 to 1976. From 1979 to 1989 she served as the UCLA Graduate Dean and Vice Chancellor of Graduate Programs. She was a visiting professor at the Universities of Stockholm, Cambridge, and Oxford. Dr. Fromkin served as president of the Linguistics Society of America in 1985, president of the Association of Graduate Schools in 1988, and chair of the Board of Governors of the Academy of Aphasia. She received the UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award and the Professional Achievement Award, and served as the U.S. Delegate and a member of the Executive Committee of the International Permanent Committee of Linguistics (CIPL). She was an elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the New York Academy of Science, the American Psychological Society, and the Acoustical Society of America, and in 1996 was elected to membership in the National Academy of Sciences. She published more than one hundred books, monographs, and papers on topics concerned with phonetics, phonology, tone languages, African languages, speech errors, processing models, aphasia, and the brain/mind/language interface—all research areas in which she worked. Professor Fromkin passed away on January 19, 2000, at the age of 76.

Robert Rodman received his bachelor's degree in mathematics from UCLA in 1961, a master's degree in mathematics in 1965, a master's degree in linguistics in 1971, and his Ph.D. in linguistics in 1973. He has been on the faculties of the University of California at Santa Cruz, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Kyoto Industrial College in Japan, and North Carolina State University, where he is currently professor of computer science. His research areas are forensic linguistics and computer speech processing. Robert resides in Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife, Helen, Blue the Labrador, and Gracie a rescued greyhound.

Nina Hyams received her bachelor's degree in journalism from Boston University in 1973 and her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in linguistics from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 1981 and 1983, respectively. She joined the UCLA faculty in 1983, where she is currently professor of linguistics and codirector of the

Bird song lacks certain fundamental characteristics of human language, such as discrete sounds and creativity. However, certain species of birds show a critical period for acquiring their "language" similar to the critical period for human language acquisition.

Calls and songs of the chaffinch vary depending on the geographic area that the bird inhabits. The message is the same, but the form or "pronunciation" is different. Usually, a young bird sings a simplified version of the song shortly after hatching. Later, it undergoes further learning in acquiring the fully complex version. Because birds from the same brood acquire different chaffinch songs depending on the area in which they finally settle, part of the song must be learned. On the other hand, because the fledging chaffinch sings the song of its species in a simple degraded form, even if it has never heard it sung, some aspect of it is biologically determined, that is, innate.

The chaffinch acquires its fully developed song in several stages, just as human children acquire language. There is also a critical period in the song learning of chaffinches as well as white-crowned sparrows, zebra finches, and many other species. If these birds are not exposed to the songs of their species during certain fixed periods after their birth—the period differs from species to species—song acquisition does not occur. The chaffinch is unable to learn new song elements after ten months of age. If it is isolated from other birds before attaining the full complexity of its song and is then exposed again after ten months, its song will not develop further. If white-crowned sparrows lose their hearing during a critical period after they have learned to sing, they produce a song that differs from other white crowns. They need to hear themselves sing in order to produce particular whistles and other song features. If, however, the deafness occurs after the critical period, their songs are normal.

On the other hand, some bird species show no critical period. The cuckoo sings a fully developed song even if it never hears another cuckoo sing. These communicative messages are entirely innate. For other species, songs appear to be at least partially learned, and the learning may occur throughout the bird's lifetime. The bullfinch, for example, will learn elements of songs it is exposed to, even those of another species, and incorporate those elements into its own quiet warble. In a more recent example of unconstrained song learning, Danish ornithologists report that birds have begun to copy the ringing tones of cellular phones.

From the point of view of human language research, the relationship between the innate and learned aspects of bird song is significant. Apparently, the basic nature of the songs of some species is present from birth, which means that it is biologically and genetically determined. The same holds true for human language: its basic nature is innate. The details of bird song, and of human language, are acquired through experience that must occur within a critical period.

The Evolution of Language

> As the voice was used more and more, the vocal organs would have been strengthened and perfected through the principle of the inherited effects of use; and this would have reacted on the power of speech. But the relation between the continued use of language and the development of the brain has no doubt been far more important. The mental powers in some early progenitor of man must have been more highly developed than in any existing ape, before even the most imperfect form of speech could have come into use.
>
> **Charles Darwin,** The Descent of Man

speaker may inadvertently switch words producing "the journal of the editor" instead of "the editor of the journal," but the switching or èxchanging of function words has not been observed. There is also evidence for this distinction from language acquisition (discussed in chapter 8). In the early stages of development, children often omit function words from their speech, for example, "doggie barking."

The linguistic evidence suggests that content words and function words play different roles in language. Content words bear the brunt of the meaning, whereas function words connect the content words to the larger grammatical context in ways that will be discussed later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

Morphemes: The Minimal Units of Meaning

> "They gave it me," Humpty Dumpty continued, "for an un-birthday present."
>
> "I beg your pardon?" Alice said with a puzzled air.
>
> "I'm not offended," said Humpty Dumpty.
>
> "I mean, what is an un-birthday present?"
>
> "A present given when it isn't your birthday, of course."
>
> **Lewis Carroll,** Through the Looking-Glass

In the foregoing dialogue, Humpty Dumpty is well aware that the prefix un- means "not," as further shown in the following pairs of words:

A	B
desirable	undesirable
likely	unlikely
inspired	uninspired
happy	unhappy
developed	undeveloped
sophisticated	unsophisticated

Webster's Third New International Dictionary lists about 2,700 adjectives beginning with *un-*. If we assume that the most basic unit of meaning is the word, what do we say about parts of words like *un-*, which has a fixed meaning? In all the words in the B column, *un-* means the same thing—"not." *Undesirable* means "not desirable," *unlikely* means "not likely," and so on. All the words in column B consist of at least two meaningful units: *un + desirable, un + likely, un + inspired*, and so on.

Just as *un-* occurs with the same meaning in the previous list of words, so does *phon-* in the following words. (You may not know the meaning of some of them, but you will when you finish this book.)

phone	phonology	phoneme
phonetic	phonologist	phonemic
phonetics	phonological	allophone
phonetician	telephone	euphonious
phonic	telephonic	symphony

Phon- is a minimal form in that it can't be decomposed. *Ph* doesn't mean anything; *pho*, though it may be pronounced like *foe*, has no relation in meaning to it;