Handout 1: What is linguistics?

Terminology

- **anthropology**: the study of human beings, including the origin of our species, our physiology, our cultures, and our languages.
- **philology**: the study of classical languages and literatures, of how languages from the same parent language become different over time, and of reconstructing ancient languages based on their daughter languages.
- **linguistics**: the study of natural human language, and all aspects of human behavior, physiology, and culture that interact with language.

Notes

The modern science of linguistics has its origins in the philology and anthropology of the 1800s, but is now distinct from these related fields.

The science of linguistics is concerned with the patterns that are found in human language, and with all aspects of human behavior that interact with human beings' ability to use language. Linguistics includes many subfields:

- **phonetics**: the study of the physics of sounds, and the organs of speech and hearing.
- **phonology**: the study of the psychological organization of speech sounds.
- **morphology**: the study of the structure and design of words.
- **syntax**: the study of the structure and design of sentences.
- **semantics**: the study of language meaning.
- **pragmatics**: the study of how abstract meaning relates to real language use.
- **sociolinguistics**: the study of the role and uses of language in human society.
- **anthropological linguistics**: the study of language as human behavior, especially its relation to culture, and how language and culture influence each other.
- **historical linguistics**: the study of how languages change over time.
- **language acquisition**: the study of language learning by children and adults.
- **psycholinguistics**: (or neurolinguistics) the study of how the brain processes language.
- **computational linguistics**: the study of how computers can process natural language.
- **applied linguistics**: applications of linguistics to education, law, and other fields.

A common misconception about linguists is that they are translators, or speak more than one language. In fact, while a few linguists are polyglots (fluent in more than one language), many linguists speak only their native language fluently.

In this course, we will be interested mainly in these subfields of linguistics: language acquisition, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and historical linguistics.
Research on Kwak’wala has focused mainly on its phonetics, its grammar—that is, its phonology, morphology, and syntax—and its history, or how it is related to other Wakashan languages. There is as yet little research, for example, on the semantics, processing, or acquisition of Kwakwala.

Exercises

Questions for group discussion:

1. What do you find interesting about language?
2. Have you ever wondered about the sounds of languages and how they are similar or different from one language to another? What have you noticed?
3. Have you ever thought about how words are built from bits of meaning? For example, how are the following words related?

   wa wa ‘river’ Kwagu’l kʷaguʔl ‘Fort Rupert people’
   bəɡwaʔəm bəɡʷəm ‘man’ Kwak’wala kʷakʷala ‘Kwakwala language’
   bəkʷəm bəkʷəm ‘Indian’ wakala wakala ‘sound of water’

4. Have you noticed that in English the doing word (verb) is in the middle of the sentence, but in Kwakwala it is at the beginning? Why do you think this is?

   ▶ Amluxwda gangananamaχ.
   ?əmɬ = uɬ = da  gənənənəma = ɬ.
   play = D2 = the children = D2
   The children are playing.

References

FirstVoices (Kwak’wala archive). www.firstvoices.ca/en/Kwakwala