Today

- What is Linguistics?
- Descriptive vs. Prescriptive rules/grammars
- Linguistic competence vs. performance

Readings: 1.2-1.3
What is Linguistics?

The scientific study and analysis of human language.
Core Subfields

- **Phonetics**: the study of the physical properties of speech sounds *(acoustic phonetics)* and how they are made *(articulatory phonetics)*

  e.g., Park the car in Harvard yard.
  
  
  \[
  [p^{\text{h}a^r k \ \text{d} \text{e} k^{\text{h}a r \ i u \ h a r v 4 d \ j a r d]} \\
  [p^{\text{h}a \text{r} \ k \ \text{d} \text{e} k^{\text{h}a \text{r} \ i \ h a \text{v} \text{i} \text{d} \text{r} \ j a \text{d}]}]
  \]
Core Subfields

- **Phonology**: the study of how speech sounds pattern and how they are organized (i.e., the sound system)

  e.g., *brick* is a real Eng word
  
  *blick* isn’t an Eng word, but could be
  
  *bnick* isn’t an Eng word and couldn’t be
Core Subfields

- **Morphology**: the study of the formation of words.

  e.g., unlockable → un-lock-able
Core Subfields

- **Syntax**: the study of the structure of sentences.

  e.g., She hit the man with a hammer.
Core Subfields

- **Semantics**: the study of meaning in language.
  
  "Inconceivable!"

  -- Vizzini, *The Princess Bride*

- **Pragmatics**: the study of how linguistic meaning depends on context.
Linguistics is NOT…

… the study of writing

…the study of how to speak properly
Grammar

- **Prescriptive grammar**
  - Prescribes rules governing what people *should/shouldn’t say*

- **Descriptive grammar**
  - Describes the rules that govern what people *do or can say*
Prescriptive rules

“Don’t end a sentence w/ a preposition!”
“Don’t split infinitives!”
“Don’t use double negatives!”

http://www.pbs.org/speak/speech/correct/
Descriptive rules

- **Phonological:**
  In English, the sounds [rt] can end a word, but not begin it.
  
  e.g., *art, *rta
  
  (‘*’ = ungrammatical)

- **Syntactic:**
  In English, adjectives precede the nouns they modify.
  
  e.g., *That is a big, red balloon.
  
  *That is a balloon big, red.
- **Descriptive rules** are natural, known intuitively, need not be taught.

- **Prescriptive rules** are not natural, must be taught/learned in school, often reflect value judgments.
Linguistic competence

- Knowledge of the (descriptive) rules that govern sounds, words, sentences in your language (what is possible vs. impossible)
- What we know when we ‘know’ a language.
- This knowledge is largely hidden, unconscious
How do we study linguistic competence?

By observing a speaker’s linguistic performance.
Linguists observe our *linguistic performance*, make and test *hypotheses*, and draw *conclusions* about what our *linguistic competence* must be like.
Why study language?

- Language is a uniquely human characteristic
- It is a means of understanding what it is to be human.