A brief overview of linguistics terminology

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1 Subfields of (general/theoretical) linguistics

- Phonology: the study of sound patterns
- Morphology: the study of the internal structure of words
- Syntax: the study of the internal structure of phrases and sentences
- Semantics: the study of meaning
- Pragmatics: the study of meaning in context

2 Some other subfields

- Phonetics - the physical/acoustic properties of sounds in language
- Psycholinguistics - how is language stored/retrieved/processed in the mind?
- Sociolinguistics - social aspects of language use
- Computational linguistics - computational models of language, NLP, AI, etc.
- Historical linguistics - how languages have changed over time

3 Terms to know

- *predicate* - something that describes (in most cases) the subject of a clause; usually a verb
- *argument* - something that “completes” the meaning of a predicate
  1. *Sandy* waltzed\textsubscript{pred}
  2. *Sandy* \{is Norwegian\}\textsubscript{pred}.
  3. *Sandy* likes\textsubscript{pred} waltzing.
- *adjunct* - an optional element of a clause, usually an adjective or adverb
  - *Sandy* waltzed\textsubscript{pred} for an hour.
- *clause* - a unit composed minimally of a subject and a predicate
- *denotation* - the set of elements in the real world picked out by a linguistic expression
- *polysemy* - the phenomenon of an expression having multiple, related meanings (e.g., window, tree, catch)
- *homonymy* - the phenomenon of an expression having multiple, unrelated meanings (e.g., pen, bat, general)
Other terms you may encounter

- **phoneme** - one of the smallest units of sound in a language, e.g. /k/ in *cat*
- **prosody** - patterns of stress and intonation in a language, AKA “suprasegmental” features
- **complementary distribution** - the occurrence of a unit (usually a phoneme) in mutually exclusive environments
- **morpheme** - the smallest meaningful unit of a word
- **thematic role** - the role that the arguments of a verb play in the event described by the verb. Some common thematic roles are *agent, patient, location, experiencer,* and *recipient.*
- **constituent** - a word or group of words that behaves as a single unit within a hierarchical structure.
- **head** - the word within a phrase that determines the syntactic category of the phrase.

Some conventions in notation

- *///* - SLASHES are used when referring to phonemes, e.g. /kæt/
- **italics** - Example words and sentences are usually italicized for clarity, e.g. “Sandy is the subject of the clause, Sandy waltzed.” Quotation marks can also be used when italicization is not available.
- **CAPITALS** - Capital letters are sometimes used to refer to abstract semantic concepts, e.g. “WRITING INSTRUMENT and ENCLOSURE are two homonymous meanings of *pen.*”