

University of Oum El Bouaghi

Department of English

**Tutor:** Dr. Selougui.S

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Module: Linguistics

### **Unit One: Traditional Grammar and Modern Linguistics**

1. Traditional Grammar
2. Modern Linguistics
3. Traditional Grammar vs Modern Linguistics

#### **1. Traditional Grammar**

**Traditional grammar** refers to the type of grammar study done prior to the beginnings of modern linguistics. Grammar, in this traditional sense, is the study of the structure and formation of words and sentences, usually without much reference to sound and meaning.

The origins of traditional grammar can be traced back to 15th century B.C., to Aristotle and Plato and Greek. However, the most prominent traditional grammarians began writing in the 18th century. Traditional grammars include prescriptive rules that are to be followed and proscriptive rules of usage to be avoided. In other words, traditional grammars told people how to use a language. For example, when describing an emotion, use of an English word descended from Latin is preferred over an Anglo-Saxon word' is an example of a prescriptive rule. It is important to note that principles of **Latin grammar** are the main basis of Traditional English grammar. Books of traditional grammar generally contain lists of grammatical terms, definitions of these terms, and advice on using **standard grammar**, which includes **correct** punctuation and spelling. Even though linguists consider traditional grammar as an irrational method to study language and grammar, we can still find basic Latin-based concepts of grammar in English textbooks and usage guides.

#### **2. Modern Linguistics**

Modern Linguistics began from the Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), who is often described as 'father of modern linguistics'. Linguistics or modern linguistics refers to the **scientific study** of language and its structure. It describes language in all its aspects, but does not prescribe rules of 'correctness'. This includes the study of features such as **grammar, syntax,**

and **phonetics**. Moreover, modern linguistics regards language as a **system**. In this sense, modern linguistics sees language as a system of systems. For traditional grammar, a sentence is a collection of words that express an idea. Modern linguistics considers such an interpretation to be very naïve and superficial. Contrarily, modern linguistics persist that language is a **complex** system. It is a system of systems and those systems are governed by a **set of rules**.

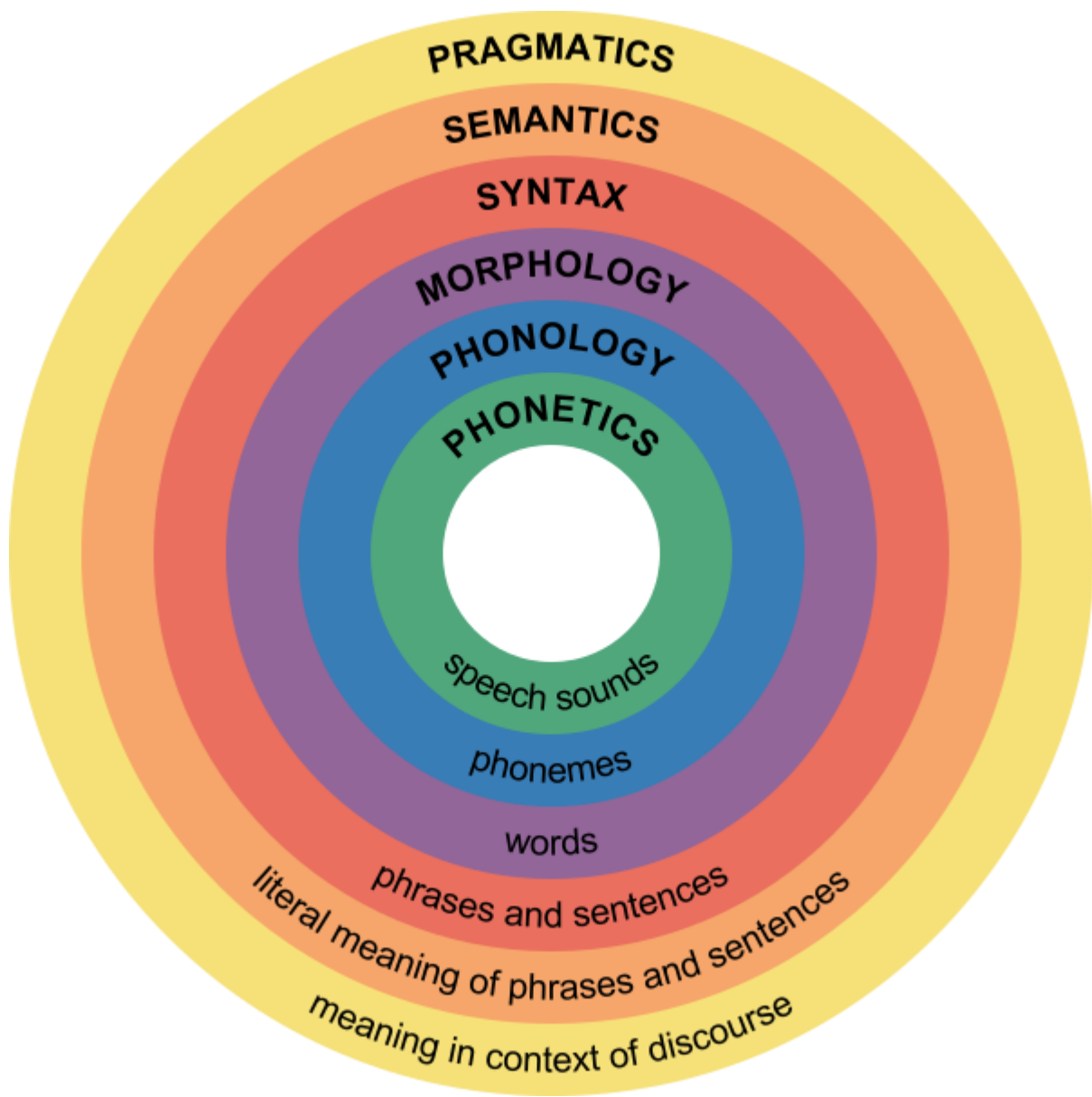


Figure 02: Major Levels of Linguistic Structure

Most importantly, modern linguistics is **descriptive**, not prescriptive i.e., modern linguistics is concerned with what people actually say, not what people should say. This contrasts with traditional grammar since traditional grammarians were more interested in what was wrong, and what was not wrong in a language. Moreover, it considers **oral language** as the basic form of language since speech is the natural and first medium of communication. Linguists also consider language change as a natural process. However, in linguistics, a language that doesn't change is a dead language.

### **3. Traditional Grammar Vs. Modern Linguistics**

Linguistics is the **scientific study** of language and its structure, including the study of grammar, syntax, and phonetics. In contrast, traditional grammar refers to the type of language study that existed before the beginnings of modern linguistics. It was a collection of **prescriptive** rules and concepts about the structure of language. Most importantly, traditional grammar is **prescriptive** whereas modern linguistics is **descriptive**. This is the main difference between traditional grammar and modern linguistics.

Furthermore, most traditional grammarians considered **written** form as the most important aspect of language; however, modern linguists consider **speech** as the most important aspect of language. Moreover, traditional grammar attempted to **force** language into a **Latin-based framework**, but modern linguists **do not judge** one language by the standards of another.

# Traditional Grammar vs Modern Linguistics

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	Traditional Grammar	Modern Linguistics
DEFINITION	Collection of prescriptive rules and concepts about the structure of language	Scientific study of language and its structure, including the study of grammar, syntax, and phonetics
ORIGIN	Origins can be traced back to the 15th century.	Derived from traditional grammar.
TYPE	Prescriptive	Descriptive
FOCUS	Written form	Speech
STANDARDS	Force language into a Latin-based framework	Does not force one language into the framework of another