A LANGUAGE APPROACH

CĂTĂLIN DEHELEAN

Keywords: *Language approach, Structural Linguistics, Computational Linguistics*

Abstract

This article is meant to advocate a transitorial approach to the study of language. Its main idea is the idea that, since language phenomena are extremely complex, to further advance their study one is bound to consider traditional approaches and develop new ones. In doing so, it highlights the development of our view of language phenomena.

Introduction

Our understanding of the language evolves in two different directions at the same time. The first direction starts with the immediate experience of outer forms which eventually leads to the differentiation between the more abstract ideas of language units. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: *A graphic representation of our range of language understanding from immediate experience to abstract ideas.*

approach level	immediate language experience	abstract linguistic ideas

The second direction takes us from the simplicity of the basic building blocks of a language to the complexity of finite language phenomena. (See Table 2.)

BDD-A12977 © 2011 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:43 UTC)

Table 2: *A graphic representation of our range of understanding from simple to complex phenomena.*

approach level
complex
medium
simple

Approaches to Language

Our understanding of the language further reflects in the way we approach it. We may refer to the surface structure of a language. In this sense, we can identify various forms of spoken and written language and their empirically deducible make-up.

Spoken Language is the first and foremost example, as it occurs naturally as discourses. They are made up of utterances which are in turn built upon various sounds. (See Table 3.)

Table 3: *A graphic representation of language approach levels in speech*

approach level	speech
complex	discourse
medium	utterance
simple	sounds

Written language is based upon spoken language and presents a similar albeit more intricate type of structure. Its achievement is the written text. The text can be divided into chapters and paragraphs. Paragraphs are based on sentences which are in turn sub-divided into clauses and phrases. Phrases are however not the last (or depending

BDD-A12977 © 2011 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:43 UTC)

on the perspective the first) building block of texts. They are the words. (See Table 4.)

Table 4: *A graphic representation of language approach levels in writing*

approach level	writing
complex	paragraph chapter text
medium	sentence clause phrase
simple	word

We may also speak about the inner workings of the language. In this respect, we may say that we undertake the task of linguistically describing the language. Firstly we are preoccupied with the units of meaning or sememes. They are built on units of structure or syntaxemes. These rely, in turn on units smaller units of meaning such as morphemes or lexemes. All of them are, however, built upon units of sound or phonemes. (See Table 5.)

Table 5: *A graphic representation of language approach levels in Linguistics*

approach level	Linguistics
complex	sememe
medium	syntaxeme
simple	morpheme lexeme phoneme

BDD-A12977 © 2011 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:43 UTC)

Approaches to Linguistics

The study of language units is highly contextualised. Each type of language unit is part of a language level.

Structural Linguistics acknowledges the existence of five language levels. The most elaborated is Structural Semantics which relies on Structural Syntax. Structural Syntax is in turn helped into existence by Structural Morphology and Structural Lexicology. All of them are based on Structural Phonology. (See Table 6)

Table 6: *A graphic representation of language approach levels in Structural Linguistics*

approach level	Structural Linguistics
complex	Semantics
medium	Syntax
simple	Morphology Lexicology Phonology

Computational Linguistics is a derivative and a follow-up of Structural Linguistics. It therefore exhibits a similar recognition of language levels albeit from its own perspective. (See Table 7.)

Table 7: *A graphic representation of language approach levels in Computational Linguistics*

approach level	Computational Linguistics
complex	Computational Semantics

BDD-A12977 © 2011 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:43 UTC)

medium	Computational Syntax
simple	Computational Morphology Computational Lexicology Computational Phonology

Conclusions

This short article tried to present three aspects. Firstly, it is has shown clear filiations between the terms related to language levels. One can see the evolution of our understanding of language phenomena from the description of physical phenomena to the description of abstract meaning. Secondly, it has explained the difference between the description of the inner workings of natural languages and the inner workings of Linguistics, that is to say, the distinction between language levels and linguistic levels. And, thirdly, it has advocated the derivative link between the traditional, descriptive approach of Structural Linguistics and the newer approach of Computational Linguistics.

Bibliography

Atkins, B.T.S., Zampoli A. (2002). *Computational Approaches to the Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bird, S. (1995). *Computational Phonology, A Constraint-Based Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hausser, R. (2001). Foundations of Computational Linguistics, Human-Computer Communication in Natural Language. Berlin: Springer.

Mitkov, R. (2003). *The Oxford Handbook of Computational Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roark B., Sproat R. (). *Computational Approaches to Morphology and Syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ronald, C., McCarthy, M. (2007). *Cambridge Grammar of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BDD-A12977 © 2011 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:43 UTC)

O ABORDARE A LIMBII
(Rezumat)

Orice încercare de descriere a limbii este legată de un anumit nivel de înţelegere. Aceste nivele de înţelegere nu sunt altceva decât grade de abstractizare. Altfel spus, pornim de la fenomenul lingvistic şi ajungem la interpretări sistemice. În acest proces trecem de la noţiunea de limbă la noţiunea de lingvistică. Acest articol încearcă să arate că reprezentarea fenomenelor lingvistice realizată de lingvistica structurală poate fi întregită de lingvistica computaţională. Aceasta din urmă, porneşte de la nivele limbii consacrate de structuralism pentru a le studia într-un mod propriu.

BDD-A12977 © 2011 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:43 UTC)