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**COLANG 2022**

# Introduction to Linguistics I

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# Introduction to Linguistics I

**Think about:** What *is* Linguistics?  
What is Language?

**Capacity-building:** What **tools** from Linguistics  
might be useful to you?

1. Transcription: primary documentation, archival work
2. Understanding the sound system of a language
3. Audio software: how *looking at* sounds can help
4. Words: what's in a word?
5. Sentences: words alone are never enough!



# What *is* Linguistics?

**Linguistics** is the study of what most uniquely defines us as the human species:

Language



# The Universality of Human Language

All human cultures have language.

Any normal child, if exposed early enough, will learn language without explicit instruction.

Any child, from any part of the world, can learn any language, if exposed to it.



Linguistics is the discipline at the very heart of the core question:

*What is the essence of being human?*

When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the “human essence”, the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, **unique to man**.

Noam Chomsky. 1968. *Language and Mind*.



**Language** is the trait  
that most conspicuously differentiates humans  
from other species.

Steven Pinker.

*Linguistics as a Window to Understanding the Brain.*

Big Think 2012.





... the gift of language is the single human trait that marks us all genetically, setting us apart from the rest of life.

Lewis Thomas. 1974. *The Lives of a Cell*.

