Is That Really Linguistics? That's Too Much Linguistics for Me!

On Metapragmatics and the Valuation of Everyday Practices in Language Studies

A Hybrid Conference of Shared Experiences

February, 03-05 2027 | U Bremen hybrid

Many linguists are familiar with the question of whether what they are currently working on is really linguistics: Is that really linguistics? Whether you acted passively or actively, you were either asked the question or asked it yourself. It is a question that presupposes a more or less clear definition of what linguistics is—where it begins and where it ends. As Becher & Trowler ([1989] 2001) argue, disciplines are shaped by internal cultures and shared understandings of what constitutes legitimate knowledge, which often leads to clearly marked boundaries and resistance to new or interdisciplinary approaches. Yet such a definition is far from fixed.

Like any other academic discipline, linguistics has undergone—and continues to undergo—significant mutations and paradigmatic shifts. From the structuralist turn of de Saussure, to the generative revolution led by Chomsky to the pragmatic turn inspired by Austin and Searle and more recently to sociolinguistic and decolonial approaches, the field has repeatedly redefined its boundaries and methods. These transformations reflect not only theoretical innovation but also evolving questions about what counts as valid linguistic inquiry. For example, Barrett & Hall (2023: 259) argue that the question of what linguistics really is "is repeatedly used by linguists to deny LGBTQ+ scholars access to public spaces" and can thus be considered as a form of academic gatekeeping. According to them, opinions range from naysayers to gatekeepers to bullies. This gatekeeping often overlooks the productive impact of interdisciplinary engagement and transdisciplinary challenges.

As linguistics intersects with fields such as anthropology, cognitive science, gender studies, digital humanities, and contradiction studies, it becomes possible—and necessary—to extend and reconsider what counts as linguistic phenomena and linguistic practice. These collaborations allow for richer, more inclusive perspectives that benefit both theory and practice. Indeed, Is that really linguistics? is often asked in a highly judgmental, harmful way and gives a negative answer at the same time, where paradigms clash, where boundaries are drawn. The question can be part of the *hidden injuries of academia* that Gill ([2009] 2016) talks about. It can be an abysmal question that determines hierarchical speaker positions and can be, or is even meant to be, demotivating. The question may even put respondents in a shameful situation. To what extent, then, is it appropriate to contest the legitimacy of certain approaches as being *not really linguistics*? For instance, rejecting discourse-analytical methodologies or the study of internet language varieties on the grounds that they fall outside the imagination of *core linguistics* disregards how new modes of communication and identity are shaping the very substance of language in use. These exclusions say more about power and disciplinary politics than about intellectual rigor.

In any case, too little is said about Is that really linguistics? And that is what we want to change.

However, while linguists not only encounter this complex question time and again in their professional lives, a completely different utterance often reveals outside views on linguistics: That's too much linguistics for me! This contrast between internal scrutiny and external perception reveals how linguistics, like many academic fields, is shaped by both self-definition and the need to explain itself to those outside the discipline. Linguists thus constantly oscillate between internal battles and the need to justify themselves to the outside world. We see this as an interesting contradictory constellation of everyday experiences that affects the subjectivation of all linguists in different ways.
We therefore invite you to a hybrid conference that aims to be both: an exchange of experiences and a reflection on how linguists position themselves and are positioned by others. We are interested in linguistic practices in the context of evaluating our own work and thus also in a metapragmatic reality of linguistics.

We intend to create a space for sharing common experiences in different subfields of linguistics and discuss implications and practices that determine as well as shift the boundaries of what is (not) considered linguistics. Additionally, we are interested in what counts as a core of linguistics and what is located at the interdisciplinary periphery of linguistics. For this, we invite anecdotal as well as more theoretical and empirical talks—or a mixture of both. However, we also invite advocates of this sentence to enter into a discussion with those who criticize it. Let's discuss the question of whether something is linguistics, and also the assumption that there can be too much linguistics! It is especially the tension between topics being *not linguistic enough* and *too linguistic* that we want to discuss together in a respectful framework.

The conference will take place at the University of Bremen, Germany, in a hybrid way, and will be hosted by the U Bremen Collaborative Research Platform Worlds of Contradiction (WOC) and is organized in cooperation with DeMarg, European Research Network on Discourses of Marginality and Marginalization. Unfortunately, we cannot reimburse travel expenses. Abstracts can be submitted until 15. September 2026 and should not exceed 300 words (excluding references). The conference itself will take place from the 3rd to 5th of February 2027. Abstracts may be submitted in either English or German. A separate section is planned for German-language papers that address the conference theme within the context of German linguistics.

Please submit your abstracts by using the following link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfR6AuMITbYSGoD8g6fwxh5-WPqu_sWpLR7s72TD-c_8KLccQ/viewform?usp=dialog

For questions please contact rltm27@uni-bremen.de

Conference Committee

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Sources

Barrett, Rusty & Kira Hall. 2023. Closet Monsters. In Tyler E. Kibbey (ed.), *Linguistics Out of the Closet*, 259–276. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
Becher, Tony & Paul R. Trowler. [1989] 2001. *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Culture of Disciplines*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Gill, Rosalind. 2016. Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of Neo-Liberal Academia. *Feministische Studien* 34(1). 39–55. [first published 2009. In Rosini Ryan-Flood & Rosalind Gill (eds.), *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process*. London: Routledge.]