

Glossary of Linguistic Terms



ENGLISH – SPANISH

Ablaut. Apofonía

The change of a vowel into another vowel in the root

of a word, with a grammatical function, usually for no visible phonological reason. Also known as vowel gradation. The alternant stems of English 'strong verbs' (*sing ~ sang ~ sung, write ~ wrote ~ written, etc.*) are examples of ablaut. See also [umlaut](#).

Acronym. Acrónimo

From Greek *acro-* in the sense of *extreme* or *tip* and *onyma* or *name*) is an abbreviation of several words in such a way that the abbreviation itself forms a word. According to Webster's, the word doesn't have to already exist; it can be a new word. Webster's cites "snafu" and "radar", two terms of World War Two vintage, as examples. Implicit is the idea that the new word has to be pronounceable and ideally easy to remember.

Active language. Idioma activo

A language whose grammar distinguishes two cases, Agentive and Patientive (A and P), and marks verb arguments like this: the subject of a transitive verb is marked as A, and its object is marked as P; the subject of an intransitive verb is marked either as A or P depending on semantic considerations (typically the degree of agency or control of the subject over the verbal action, or whether the verb shows a state or an event). Active languages can be split-S or fluid-S. Georgian, as well as other Caucasian languages in the same family, is part active (even though usually described as ergative).

Allophone. Alófono

Each of the sounds that are grouped in a phoneme. The allophones of a phoneme are usually in **complementary distribution**, which means that, given the conditions for the phoneme to be realised as one particular allophone, all the rest are excluded in that position. From Greek *allo-* 'other'.

Allomorph. Alomorfo

Each one of the forms that a morpheme can take. For example, the (regular) plural morpheme in English is realised as three allomorphs, with phonemical values /s/, /z/, and /ɪz/. Allomorphs can be conditioned by some phonetic issue, or by grammatical features. From *allo-* 'other', *morph-* 'form, shape'.

Alveoli. Alvéolos (del paladar)

The spaces that are found just behind the back side of the upper teeth, and before the palatal ridge. Here is the where **alveolar** sounds are produced, such as /l/, /t/ and /s/.

Analytic language. Lenguaje analítico

A language that tends to mark distinctions on verbs, nouns, etc. by means of syntax, word order and the use of general lexical terms rather than by morphological elements (the opposite is synthetic). From Greek *ana-* 'up, throughout' + *lysis* 'loosening', literally 'breaking up, splitting'). In an analytic language, words get few prefixes and suffixes; verbs are usually not marked for tense, person or aspect,

nor are nouns marked for number or gender. These distinctions are left unmentioned or are shown by separate words instead of declensions and grammatical cases. The tendency to analysis can be manifested in several different fields, but in general it causes words to have less semantic content in themselves, syntax (the structure of combination of words in sentences) acquiring a greater importance. Examples of analytic languages are English and Chinese, which share the features of having very little verb and noun morphology, and showing a very rigid word order (SVO, subject-verb-object, which is the most common among languages which don't mark subject and object as such, because the verb takes care of separating them).

Antipassive voice. Voz pasiva

A voice usually found in ergative languages, in which a transitive verb becomes intransitive, its subject being changed from the ergative/agentive case to the absolutive/patientive case.

Apocope. Apócope

A change that consists in the deletion of a final sound. The loss of final *e* in English (still written) is an example. Spanish has a phenomenon of conditioned apocope for some adjectives: *grande* becomes *gran* when placed before a noun (*hombre grande* vs. *gran hombre*). The word comes from Greek *apo-* 'away' + *koptein* 'cut'. See also elision and syncope.

Approximant. Aproximante

A sound that is produced while the airstream is barely disturbed by the tongue, lips or other vocal organs. Approximants are often called glides, semivowels or semiconsonants. Examples of these are *w* and *y* in English; /ɹ/ is an approximant too, since, although the tongue closes the airstream at the alveola, more air flows, barely modulated, through the sides of the tongue. Approximants are generally voiced, since an unvoiced approximant is practically inaudible.

Auslautverhärtung.

Final (obstruent) devoicing (Or: Final hardening)

The devoicing (change from voiced to unvoiced) of stops at the ends of syllables or words. Examples: German *Tag* 'day' /tak/ vs. *Tagen* 'days' /tagən/.

Classifier. Clasificador

A small word or affix to denote some kind of property of invariable nouns, e. g. whether it is male or female (according to some theories, classifiers are the origin of grammatical gender), or what is the shape of an object. Examples of classifier languages are Japanese, Yucatec Mayan and Sesotho.

Click. Clic (Chasquido)

An ingressive sound that is produced as follows: the airstream is closed in two points of the mouth, one of which is always the velum, and the other is closer to the front of the mouth. By forcing the velar closure

backwards, a lower pressure is produced in the cavity thus formed between the two closures. Once reached a certain point, the first (front) closure is released, letting air in with a popping sound. Indeed, this mechanism is analogous to the pop of a closed bottle when the cork is removed and air comes in abruptly due to the difference of pressure. Clicks are particularly frequent in some African languages. The most common ones are those produced with the both lips, with the tongue and the alveola, and with the tongue and the palate.

Deixis. Demostrativos (pronombres)

The reference system of a language. By references we mean the words used to refer to objects, people and other things situated in different locations, times, contexts within the sentence, etc. These words are called **deictics** or **demonstratives**. In English we have a system of two deixis levels: one for objects close at hand ('this, these'), and another one for objects far from the speaker ('that, those').

Demotion. Degradación

The syntactic operation that takes a verb argument down in the argument hierarchy (usually subject → object → complement). English passive voice demotes the subject to the position of an optional complement ('oblique'), as in "A dog bit me" → "I was bitten [by a dog]". The antipassive voice found in many ergative languages preserves the subject but demotes the object (detransitivization in ergative languages also

demotes the subject in a way, by turning an agent into a patient). The inverse operation is called promotion.

Diachronical. Diacrónico

One of the two ways of studying a language with respect to time. Diachronical means 'through/across time'; it refers to the evolution of each feature of the language, and the relationship between present forms with past forms throughout changes. See synchronical.

Dvanda compound. Lexema copulativo

A type of compound in which there is a simple conjunction of two words, without any further dependency holding between them. For example: 'Bosnia-Herzegovina', 'mother-child'.

Egressive. Egresivo

Said of the sounds that are produced by means of an outcome (egression) of air, more or less abrupt, which comes from the lungs and flows through the oral and/or nasal tract. The immense majority of sounds are egressive. There are a minority of ingressive sounds, produced by an airstream which comes from the outside of the mouth. All the sounds in English and in general of all European languages are egressive.

Ejective. Eyectivo

Said of sounds (generally unvoiced stops) that are produced in the following way: the airstream is closed

in some point (for example, for an ejective /p/, the lips), and the glottis is closed too. Then both closures are released at the same time. An ejective consonant followed by a vowel can be simulated by making a pause between them, and then progressively joining the consonant with the pause. These sounds are also known as egressive glottalics.

Elision. Elisión

A change that consists in the loss of unstressed vowels or syllables. English reduces and sometimes elides (produces elision) of unstressed vowels in long words like *secretary*, *laboratory*, *elementary*. See also *apocope* and *syncope*.

endocentric compound

compuesta endocéntrica (oración, estructura)

A type of compound in which one member functions as the head and the other as its modifier, attributing a property to the head. For example: 'steamboat' ('boat' is the head, 'steam' is the modifier). This is an endocentric compound because 'steamboat' is a noun, like 'boat', and a steamboat is a particular kind of boat. See *exocentric compound*.

Epenthesis. Epéntesis

A phenomenon of sound change that consists in the interposition of a sound between two others, usually because they are deemed difficult to pronounce in a row. For example, Latin *hominem* gave Spanish *hombre* through syncope, dissimulation and

epenthesis: *hominem* → *homne* → *homre* → *hombre*
(the medial *b* is epenthetic). See also *liaison*.

Ergative-absolutive language

Lengua ergativo-absolutiva

(Also just "ergative".) A language where the subject of a transitive verb is marked with a grammatical case conventionally known as the ergative, while both the subject of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive verb are marked with another case, conventionally known as absolutive. The absolutive is the least-marked case in ergative languages (like the nominative in nominative/accusative languages). Examples of ergative languages are Euskara (Basque), Inuktitut, and some Australian languages. Some languages are of mixed types: Hindi is accusative in the imperfect tenses, and ergative in the perfect ones. Other languages use ergative constructions for some grammatical persons and accusative ones for others (see split ergativity). Ergative languages tend not to have a passive voice but an antipassive.

exocentric compound.

compuesta exocéntrica (oración, estructura)

A compound that lacks a head, for example 'smart-ass' (which is neither a wise thing or any kind of ass). Also known by the name given to them by Sanskrit grammarians, *bahuvrihi compound*. See *endocentric compound*.

fluid-S. S-fluida

Said of active languages where the grammatical subject (S) is marked with one of two core cases, Agentive or Patientive, according to the semantics of the verb and the context. See split-S. In fluid-S languages, as in split-S languages, there are two core cases named Agentive (A) and Patientive (P). The subjects of transitive verbs are always marked with A and their objects are always marked with P. The subjects of intransitive verbs are marked either A or P depending on the situation. If the verb is considered to be expressing an action produced by an Agent (the definition of Agent will vary), the subject will be marked with A; if the subject is considered to be the Patient (or undergoer) of the action or state expressed by the verb, it will be marked with P. While in split-S languages the case structure is fixed for each verb, in fluid-S languages the decision of using A or P has to be made for each particular context.

Fricative. Fricativos

Said of consonant sounds that are produced with an airstream that is partially closed in some point of the oral tract, in such a way that audible friction is produced. Examples of unvoiced fricatives are /f s h/ in English.

Geminated. Geminada (consonante larga)

Lengthened (said of consonants), or doubled. Geminated consonants are unknown in English, but appear in many other languages, like Italian (written

as double consonants: *pizza, otto, Massimo, doppio*).

Glottalic. Glotal

Said of sounds that are pronounced with some major contribution of the glottis (either a movement or a closure), in particular ejective and implosive sounds.

Idiolect. idiolecto

The particular way of speaking of a given person; the personal dialect of an individual, which probably does not differ much from the idiolects of those around him/her, but is always a bit different according the personal choice of words and phrases, shades of pronunciation, etc. An **idiolectal** feature is therefore a feature of the language that varies for each particular speaker. From Greek *idios* 'one's own'.

Implosive. Plosivo (sonidos plosivos)

Said of the sounds (generally voiced stops) that are produced in the following way: first the airstream is closed in some point (for example, for an implosive /b/, in the lips). Then, at the same time, the closure is released allowing air to enter the mouth, and the glottis is lowered (this produces, in men, a visible movement down of their Adam's apple). The movement of the glottis provokes a decrement of pressure inside the mouth, causing air to enter, and it causes a characteristic sound effect, as of 'hollowness'. These sounds are also known as ingressive glottalics.

Ingressive. Ingresivo

Said of sounds that are produced by a stream of air that enters the mouth. Most sounds are otherwise egressive, produced a outgoing of air. The only ingressive sounds are the implosives and the clicks. Ingressive sounds are rather rare in human languages. The European languages like English or Spanish don't have any; some African languages are particularly rich in ingressives.

Labialization. Labialización

Adding a secondary labial articulation, with lip-rounding, to a basic sound. The effect is similar to pronouncing the given consonant and *w* simultaneously. The very sound of English *w* could be technically called a labialized velar approximant. See also palatalization.

Lax. Relajada (vocal relajada)

Said of a vowel that contrasts with a tenser (more constricted) version. Compare the tense vowel in *beat* and the lax vowel in *bit*. See *tense*.

Liaison. Encadenamiento

The introduction of a sound between two other sounds, especially between words. It's a form of epenthesis. The word comes from French, where this phenomenon is frequent, and means 'binding' (pronounce 'lee-ay-ZO', with nasal O). In French, liaison causes usually deleted final sounds to reappear when the next word begins with a vowel (English

change *a* → *an* is also an example).

mood of articulation. Modo de articulación

The way in which a sound (especially a consonant) is articulated or pronounced, with respect to the flux of air. A consonant can be a stop (with complete closure of the airstream, as in /p/); a fricative (with an incomplete closure of the airstream, though enough to produce friction, such as /s/); an affricate (a stop combined with a fricative at the same point of articulation, like English *ch*); or an approximant (with almost no obstruction of the airstream, like English *y* and some other sounds called 'semivowels').

Mora. Demorada

A suprasegmental unit of length, smaller than or coincidental with a syllable, that is studied as a part of the stress pattern of the language. From Latin *mora* 'delay', plural *morae*. Some languages are based on *morae* instead of syllables for stress considerations (as with 'syllable', every language defines 'mora' in its own way). Japanese, for example, counts a short vowel, a syllable-final *n* or a geminated consonant as one mora, and a long vowel as two *morae*, and the accent (pitch change) can fall over any mora, including that in the middle of a long vowel.

Morpheme. Morfema

A unit of meaning, be it a root (such as 'dog', 'house', 'red', 'bright', etc.), or a derivative concept (like the repetitive morpheme 're-'), or an abstract concept

(such as number, gender, verb tense, etc.) Morphemes can be realised in many ways. Roots are typically a group of sounds that don't change. The rest of the concepts can appear as affixes (a prefix or suffix), a preposition, a change of the stressed vowel in the root, or the absence of one of these (by contrast with the presence of another morpheme of opposite meaning). For example, the word *piglets* in English has three morphemes: a root *pig-* referring to the animal, a diminutive morpheme *-let-*, and a plural suffix *-s*. Some morphemes, like *pig-*, are compulsory (all nouns need a root!); some others, like *-let-*, are optional, and their place can be left empty; some, like *-s*, belong to a fixed set of which one must occur. (Yes, you can leave out *-s* and have a well-formed word, but the absence of *-s* is a **zero morpheme**, which marks singular number; all nouns in English have number. The absence of *-let-* is not a morpheme.)

The way in which a language joins morphemes to form words is called **morphology** (which means 'study of the form/shape'). Analytic languages tend to have fewer complications in their morphology, preferring to use roots (**radical morphemes**) in the pure basic form. Synthetic languages usually feature a complicated morphology.

Morphemes are not only realised as the presence or absence of affixes: the change of the vowels of many English 'irregular' verbs (**vowel alternation**, or **Ablaut**) is also a morpheme. This morpheme is not manifested as a group of sounds getting joined to others, but as a change. The combination of several

changes and/or affixes can be one morpheme too, such as *sleep* changing the vowel and adding a suffix to form *slept*. Even a tonal change (in tonal languages like Chinese) can constitute a morpheme.

Nasal. Nasal (sonidos nasales)

Said of the sounds that are pronounced at the same time as the airstream goes through the nose. In particular, the name of **nasals** is by default reserved for consonants that are stops in the oral tract while the air goes freely through the nasal tract, like /m/ and /n/. These are the most common nasals. Nasal vowels are found too (as in French or Portuguese).

nominative/accusative language lenguaje nominal / acusativo

A language where the subject of any verb is marked with a grammatical case conventionally known as the nominative, while the object of a transitive verb is marked with another case, called the accusative. Most Indoeuropean languages (English, German, Spanish, Italian, French, Greek, Latin, etc.) are nominative/accusative.

Palatalization. Palatalización

Adding a secondary palatal articulation to a basic sound by raising the middle part of the tongue towards the palatal ridge. The effect is similar to pronouncing the given consonant and /j/ (English *y*) simultaneously. While English doesn't have palatalized sounds, *ch* sounds a bit like a palatalized *t*.

Russian has a whole series of palatalized consonants (orthographically marked with an apostrophe). See also *labialization*.

Palate (soft, hard). Paladar (blando, duro)

The 'vault' that rises in the middle of the mouth cavity; in particular, its front rim, the **palatal ridge** or **hard palate**, which rises after the alveola. There, near the borders, the sounds called **palatals** are produced, of which English has *ch, sh, y*. At the summit of the palate, with the tongue curled backwards, a different kind of sound is produced, which we call retroflex. The back part of the palate is not considered a part of it for our purposes, but forms the velum.

Paradigm. Paradigma

A table or set that shows the ways to conjugate a verb, decline or inflect a noun, etc., in all possible ways, by using a model (the word *paradigm* means model or example). For example, a verb conjugation table is used in Spanish with three traditional model verbs (*amar, temer, vivir*) in all tenses, persons, numbers and moods; it's a verb paradigm (comprising three sub-paradigms). English doesn't need paradigms, except very small ones, since it's much more analytic. The word literally means 'to show side by side', from Greek *para-* 'beside', *deiknynai* 'to show'.

Periphrasis. Perífrasis

The expression of grammatical operations by means

of auxiliaries, idiomatic phrases, particles, word order, etc. (an analytic strategy) instead of using direct inflection. English uses periphrastic constructions for the future tense (the auxiliary *will*), for the passive voice (the verb *be* and the past participle of the original verb), for the prospective aspect (*be going to*), as well as in many other cases. Other languages directly inflect the verb for all these purposes. Periphrasis comes from Greek *peri-* 'around', as in 'phrasing around a meaning' (compare 'circumlocution' = 'speaking around [a taboo subject]', i. e. euphemism).

Phoneme. Fonema

A group of sounds (similar or not) which the speakers of a particular language consider a unit. The sounds in a phoneme are called phones. A phoneme can consist of one or more phones, and is generally (though not often) represented by the phone that occurs most often. The phones of one phoneme are called its **allophones** (and allophones of each other), or **allophonic variants**. Phonemes are written between slashes //, while allophones are written between square brackets [].

For example: in English /b/ has a single allophone [b]. On the other hand, /p/ has two, [p_h] and [p]. The first one is aspirated (released with a puff of air), and occurs word-initially and at the beginning of stressed syllables (as in *post*, *appear*). The second is unaspirated, and occurs everywhere else. Of the allophones of a given phoneme it's said that they are

in **complementary distribution**: one cannot occur where the other does. This also implies that, within the language in question, if one pronounces an allophone that doesn't correspond in that position, it may sound weird; but a new (possible) word will not be produced, since the allophones of one particular phoneme are, by definition, treated as one and the same sound by the speakers. In fact, most of them won't be able to recognize a difference between allophones unless they're made to notice. In another language, the difference might be phonemic (i. e. the same sounds will occur, but instead of being allophones they will be two separate phonemes).

Alófonos Variantes alofónicas

point of articulation.

Punto de articulación

The place within the vocal organs (the mouth, the throat, etc.) where a sound is produced or articulated, especially a consonant. It also includes a specification of which organs are in contact with which, and which parts of them. The most common points of articulation are: **bilabial** (between the lips, as in /b/); **labiodental** (between one of the lips and the teeth, such as /f/); **dental** (between the tongue and the back side of the teeth, like /θ/ [English hard *th*]); **alveolar** (between the tongue and the alveola, such as /s/); **palatal** (between the tongue and the palatal ridge, like English *y*; retroflex (with the tongue curled backwards and touching the top of the palate); **velar**

(at the velum, as in /k/); **uvular** (at the uvula, the fleshy blob hanging at the back of the throat); **glottal** (with a closure of the glottis). Depending on the part of the tongue that takes part of it, you can also precise that the articulation is **apical** (with the apex or tip of the tongue), **laminal** (with the blade or middle part of the tongue), or **sublaminal** (with the lower side of the tongue, which is quite rare). See also *mood of articulation*.

Promotion.

The syntactic operation that takes a verb argument up in the argument hierarchy (usually complement → object → subject). From *pro-motion* 'forward-movement'. English passive voice promotes the object to the subject position, as in "A dog bit me" → "I was bitten by a dog". The inverse operation is called demotion.

Retroflex. Retroflejo (sonido)

A sound that is produced at the point of articulation that is found at the top of the palate, with the tip of the tongue curled backwards in such a way that the lower face of the tongue touches the palate. Some languages (as different as Swedish and Hindi) have entire series of retroflex sounds; most varieties of American English have only one, /ɾ/ (which can be a semivowel). Mandarin Chinese has a retroflex series composed of a fricative, a non-aspirated affricate, and an aspirated affricate, transliterated (in Pinyin) as *sh*, *zh*, *ch*. 'Retro-flex' literally means 'backwards-curl'.

satellite-framed language

A language in which directed motion is usually expressed by verbs showing manner of motion ('run', 'crawl', 'slide') while a satellite or particle associated with the verb shows the path of motion ('in', 'out', 'by', etc.). All Indo-European languages except the Romance languages (thus including Germanic), as well as Finno-Ugric and Chinese languages, are of this kind. English accordingly has a large set of verbs showing manner of motion, and a set of particles that are applied to them to show motion path. The only English verbs that directly encode motion path are Latinate ('exit', 'ascend', 'descend', etc.). Contrast this with Spanish, which is a verb-framed language. "She went out, up the hill and down the other slope" is rendered into Spanish as the equivalent of "She exited, ascended the hill and descended on the other slope".

Split ergativity. Intransitividad dividida

A feature of some languages (like the Austronesian language Dyirbal) that are syntactically and morphologically ergative/absolutive but show morphological patterns typical of nominative/accusative languages when referring to first and second persons. The rationale behind this seems to be as follows: 1) the least-marked case should be used for the most common situation; 2) in transitive sentences, the subject is usually the agent; 3) an agent is most commonly an actual person (the

speaker or the hearer); 4) an agent, in a pure ergative language, receives the ergative case, which is the most-marked (contradicting #1); 5) therefore, a first or second person that acts as an agent/subject should be marked with the least-marked case, while a first or second person that acts as a patient/object (less common) should be marked with the most-marked case; 6) the system that marks agents and patients this way is the nominative/accusative.

split-S

Said of active languages where the grammatical subject (S) of intransitive verbs is marked with one of two core cases, Agentive or Patientive, according to the semantics of the verb, for each given verb.

Contrast this with nominative-accusative languages, where the subject is always marked with one case (conventionally known as the Nominative), and with ergative-absolutive languages, where the subject is marked according to the transitivity of the verb (a syntactic property). In split-S languages, the difference is given by semantic considerations (is the subject of the verb its Agent, as in "I'm eating" or its Patient ("I'm falling"))? The precise definition of what an Agent or a Patient is depends on the language (is a falling rock an agent of the action of hitting someone? If I sneeze, am I an agent, even though I didn't do it by my own will?). The speaker may not decide whether a subject is an agent or a patient for a given verb. See also fluid-S.

Stop. Plosivas (consonantes)

A consonant that is pronounced by completely blocking the airstream at some point of the mouth, and then releasing the closure abruptly. For example:

/p t k b d g/.

Suppletion. Omisión

The use of two or more distinct (phonetically unrelated) stems for the inflection of a single lexical item, such as the articles *le* and *la* in French, or pairs like *good* ~ *better* and *go* ~ *went* in English. .

Synchronical. Sincrónicos

One of the two possible approaches to the study of a language with respect to time. Synchronical means 'at the same time, simultaneous' (Greek *syn-* 'together'); it refers to the particular state of each feature of the language at some given point in time, without taking into account its origin or the changes that produced it in its present state, but focusing on its description at the reference moment, and its relations with other features. See *diachronical*.

Syncope. Sincope

The deletion of a medial sound. It appears in the change of Latin into Spanish: *fabulare* → *hablar*, *anima* → *alma*, etc. The word comes from Greek *syn-* 'together' + *koptein* 'cut'. See also *elision* and *apocope*.

Synthetic. Flexiva (lengua sintética)

Said of a language that tends to mark many distinctions over the roots of words, using specific morphology (prefixes, suffixes, Ablaut, etc.). This may imply a great amount of morphology to mark tense, person, number, aspect, mood, voice, etc. on verbs; grammatical case and gender on nouns, etc. In synthetic languages, word order tends to be more relaxed, and can in principle be altered without a great chance of confusion, since words tend to agree among them (adjectives with nouns, generally, agreeing in number, gender and/or case). The added complications of morphology are compensated by a less severe syntax than that of analytic languages; isolated words have a greater semantic content than in those, without so much resort to their relationships with other words (syntax). Sometimes incredible levels of synthesis can be reached, in which case the language is called **polysynthetic**; single words in these languages can contain as much information as entire sentences in more analytic tongues. Examples of synthetic languages are Latin, Greek, and to a lesser degree all European languages (though English is very analytic now). Polysynthesis is typical in Native American languages. French has been lately classified as polysynthetic, since it has phrases like *je ne sais pas*, which though written as four words is phonologically one -- encoding, besides the verb, also tense, person, number, mood and negation. Synthetic languages are also referred to as 'flexional'. The word 'synthesis' is etymologically the same as Latin 'composition', from *syn-* 'together' + *tithenai* 'put,

place'.

Tense. Tiempo verbal

Said of a vowel that is produced with a tongue body or tongue root configuration involving a greater constriction than that found in their lax counterparts. English, for example, has tense /i/ as in *wheel* contrasting with lax /ɪ/ as in *will*.

Topic. Asunto

As the name suggests, the topic of a sentence is the thing that is talked about. Another name for it is 'theme', which is opposed to 'rheme' or predicate (the things that are said about the theme or topic). In English the topic is usually the grammatical subject, but this is not always the case. Some languages, like Japanese, mark the topic with special morphology. In many languages this is done through word order (the topic appears at the beginning of the sentence). See topic fronting.

topic fronting. Inversión

Moving the topic to the beginning of the sentence, especially when it should not be there in a syntactically typical context. For example, English places the direct object after the verb, but when the object becomes the topic it is sometimes fronted: "This I did" instead of "I did this". The placement of interrogative words at the beginning of the sentence is also an example of topic fronting.

Umlaut. Diéresis

A kind of vowel mutation that consists in the change of a vowel into another influenced by some feature of a vowel in the following syllables. In German (where the term comes from) Umlaut means the fronting of a back vowel conditioned by the presence of a following front vowel (*tur* ~ *türchen*, *Haus* ~ *Häuse*, etc.).

English preserves some words that used to have a plural ending in /i/ (now lost) and alternate back and front vowels, such as *foot* ~ *feet*, *mouse* ~ *mice*, etc.

See also *ablaut*.

unaccusative verb. Verbo acusativo

An intransitive verb that usually has a theme subject and expresses change of state or existence, such as 'break', 'die', 'bleed', etc. The past participle of the verb can be used as an adjective (see also *unergative*).

unergative verb. Verbo ergativo

An intransitive verb that usually has an agentive subject and expresses a volitional act, such as 'sleep', 'laugh', 'fly', etc. The past participle of the verb cannot be used as an adjective (see also *unaccusative*).

Unvoiced. Sordos (sonidos, vocales sordas)

Said of sounds that are produced without vibration of the vocal cords (also called voiceless). The opposite of this term is *voiced*. Examples of unvoiced sounds are the stops /p t k/ and the fricatives /f s/.

Velum. Velo (del paladar)

Also known as **soft palate**. The back part of the palate, where **velar** sounds are produced, such as /k/, /g/ and /ŋ/ (*eng*).

Voice. Voz (pasiva, activa)

(GRAMMAR; VERBS) Voice indicates the functions attributed to the arguments of a verb. It indicates whether the subject is an agent, a patient, etc. A change of voice shifts, adds and/or deletes arguments. In English and the Romance languages we have periphrastic constructions to show passive voice, in which the subject is the patient (or experiencer) and the agent (or actor) can be optionally shown by a complement (e. g. "She was punished [by her mother]"). The Romance languages also have a middle/mediopassive voice, which looks like a reflexive; it deletes the object and treats the subject as agent and patient, or agent and beneficiary (Spanish *Yo me lavo* "I wash [myself]"; Italian *avvicinarsi* "to come close, to get [oneself] near"). The ergative languages tend to have an antipassive voice that deletes the object (detransitivization), changing the subject from agent (ergative case) to patient (absolute case). In some cases one finds an applicative voice, which adds (as an object) an argument that was formerly a complement of place, time, manner, etc. ("He lives in this house" becomes the equivalent of "He inhabits this house", with "this house" being promoted from the position of a complement of place to the position of direct object).

PHONOLOGY. Fonología

Voice is the quality of vibration of the vocal cords as a given sound is pronounced. Consonants like /p t k f s/, in which the vocal cords do not vibrate, are called voiceless or unvoiced. There are some languages with unvoiced vowels, like Japanese. Consonants like /b d g v z/, as well as vowels in most languages, which are pronounced with the vocal cords vibrating, are called voiced.

Voiced. Sonoras (vocals, sonidos)

Said of sounds that are produced with vibration of the vocal cords. The opposite of this term is unvoiced (or voiceless.) Examples of voiced sounds are the stops /b d g/, the approximants /l r/, the nasals /m n/ and the vowels. The vibration of the vocal cords is easy to test, by placing an open hand over the throat while the sound is emitted.

Vowel. Vocal

A sound that is produced as a stream of air that is not obstructed or blocked in any way by the vocal organs, but only modulated by the position of the tongue, lips, etc. Vowels are classified according to their height (defined as the relative rising of the tongue); their frontness (the position of the risen part of the tongue, be it the front, center or back of the mouth); their rounding (produced or not by the lips); and their nasality (positive if air goes through the nose as the time as through the mouth). English has around

twelve vowels according the dialect; a more classic model is Latin, with only five vowels, which in order front-to-back are /i e a o u/. /i/ and /u/ are high; /e/ and /o/ are middle; /a/ is low. /i/ and /e/ are front; /a/ is central; /o/ and /u/ are back. Back vowels are also rounded in English and Latin; the others are not rounded; and there are no nasal vowels, only oral ones. In German, on the other hand, there are front rounded vowels (ü and ö). In French, besides these, there's a series of nasal vowels. English's most pervasive vowel, the schwa, is a central, middle, unrounded sound, which in ASCII IPA is written /ə/ (in IPA, it's e with a 180-degree turn). The languages with the least vowels have two, generally /a/ and some high sound like /i/ which can shift its pronunciation widely. Languages with three vowels almost always have /i a u/, where /i/ can be pronounced as /e/ and /u/ as /o/ according to the neighbouring sounds. European languages have about seven vowels on average. The languages with the most vowels are African, belonging to the Khoisan family; the record seems to be of 24 vowels.

Vowels are normally voiced. An unvoiced (or voiceless) vowel is by definition barely audible; it can sound quite like English /h/ or a whisper emitted by the vocal organs in position for the vowel. In some languages, such as Japanese, some vowels become unvoiced when in contact with unvoiced consonants, at the end of words, when not stressed, etc.