Preface

Dear Learner,

*An Introduction to Linguistics* provides an introduction to the scientific study of human languages, concentrating on the similarity and diversity of the languages of the world. In addition, we will examine and explore the properties of human language that make it unique; and that make it uniquely powerful in studying the human mind. We will be searching for answers to the questions, “What do people know when they know a language?” and How do they get that knowledge?

The study of linguistic knowledge is divided into several areas: the study of sounds and their patterns (Phonetics and Phonology), words (Morphology), sentences (Syntax) and meanings (Semantics). Linguistics also studies how linguistic knowledge is applied in social situations in different cultures (Sociolinguistics), how languages change over time (Historical or Diachronic linguistics) and how people learn languages (Language Acquisition). The last three areas involve language comparison and you are going to study them next semester.

The diversity of human languages and the prominent role language plays in culture make language a critically important factor in studying human behaviour. The study of linguistics is concerned with every language, but you will notice that many of the examples come from non-Western languages. Homework assignments and exam questions will include data from many unfamiliar languages.
By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- transcribe English words phonetically
- apply pronunciation rules
- discover pronunciation rules from language data
- diagram the internal structure of words
- discover and justify word structures from language data
- diagram the internal structure of sentences
- discover and justify sentence structure from language data
- explain differences of meaning
- compare languages and dialects in terms of pronunciation, words, sentences and meanings
- compare child language with adult language in terms of pronunciation, words, sentences and meanings.

Conscientious application to the exercises, self-assessment questions (SAQs) and activities in this course will help you understand the whole subject.