

UMBC EMINENT SCHOLAR MENTOR PROGRAM

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Why Do Languages Have Nouns and Verbs?

Most if not all languages make a grammatical distinction between nouns and verbs. The traditional view is that this distinction is based on semantics, nouns denoting things and verbs denoting events. I argue that the distinction is not based on semantics but in the way different types of words pattern in discourse.

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Matthew S. Dryer is Professor of Linguistics at SUNY Buffalo and a leading scholar in linguistic typology, syntax, and language documentation. He is co-editor of the *World Atlas of Language Structures*, a typological database of structural properties of languages. The atlas was published by Oxford University Press in August 2005. His language documentation interests include Kutenai, a language isolate spoken in North America, and Papuan languages.

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