**HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS**

**HISTORY OF LANGUAGE**

**by**

**DR. SIMON PETER ONGODIA**

**0772423303, 0701423303, 0756090112**

simongodia@gmail.com

simon.ongodia@kiu.ac.ug

**2023**

Contents

[COURSE OUTLINE 3](#_Toc495077074)

[**Historical linguistics** 6](#_Toc495077075)

[**More about historical linguistics** 7](#_Toc495077076)

[**Introduction to Historical Linguistics** 7](#_Toc495077077)

[**History of historical linguistics** 8](#_Toc495077078)

[An Introduction to Historical Linguistics 8](#_Toc495077079)

[Examples and Observations 9](#_Toc495077080)

[The Nature and Causes of Language Change 9](#_Toc495077081)

[Dealing with Historical Gaps 9](#_Toc495077082)

[**History and development** 10](#_Toc495077083)

[**Diachronic and synchronic analysis** 10](#_Toc495077084)

[**Comparative linguistics** 12](#_Toc495077085)

[**Etymology** 12](#_Toc495077086)

[**Dialectology** 12](#_Toc495077087)

[**Phonology** 12](#_Toc495077088)

[**Morphology** 13](#_Toc495077089)

[**Syntax** 13](#_Toc495077090)

[**Rates of change and varieties of adaptation** 14](#_Toc495077091)

[**Evolutionary context** 14](#_Toc495077092)

[**Citations and notes** 14](#_Toc495077093)

[**References** 15](#_Toc495077094)

[Synchrony and diachrony 15](#_Toc495077095)

[Dialectic 16](#_Toc495077096)

[Principles 16](#_Toc495077097)

[Western dialectical forms 17](#_Toc495077098)

[Classical philosophy 17](#_Toc495077099)

[Medieval philosophy 19](#_Toc495077100)

[Modern philosophy 19](#_Toc495077101)

[Indian forms 24](#_Toc495077102)

[Indian continental debate: an intra- and inter-Dharmic dialectic 25](#_Toc495077103)

[Dialectical theology 26](#_Toc495077104)

[Dialectical method and dualism 27](#_Toc495077105)

[Criticisms 27](#_Toc495077106)

[Formalism 28](#_Toc495077107)

[Further reading 28](#_Toc495077108)

# COURSE OUTLINE

**HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS MLI**

**HISTORY OF LANGUAGE MAE**

**COURSE CODE: LIN 7304/ENL 7304**

**HOURS TAUGHT: Three hours per week**

**PREREQUISITES: None**

**PURPOSE OF THE COURSE**

Every living language changes over time. The purpose of the course unit is to stimulate, develop and sustain students’ awareness of language change, whereby English is to offer itself as the source of exemplificatory material.

**EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the course unit, students should be able to:

* Employ general principles of semantics, syntax, morphology, lexicology, phonology and graphology to analyze the historical development of English.
* Relate and explain problems that crop up in present-day English to the historical development of the language.

**COURSE CONTENT**

* Causes of language change
	+ Articulatory simplification
	+ Spelling pronunciation
	+ Analogy
	+ Reanalysis
	+ Language contact
* Types of language change
	+ Semantic change
	+ Syntactic change
	+ Morphological change
	+ Lexical change
	+ Phonological changes
	+ Graphological change
* Proto-Indo-European
	+ Celtic, Italic, Hellenic, Tocharian, Baltic, Slavic, Indo-Iranian, Albanian, Armenian, Anatolian
	+ Germanic
* The Germanic branch of Indo- European
	+ East Germanic
	+ North Germanic
	+ West Germanic
	+ German, Yiddish, Dutch, Flemish, Frisian, Afrikaans
	+ English
* Major periods in the development of English
	+ Old English (OE) 450-1100
	+ Middle English (ME) 1100- 1500
	+ Modern English (Mod E) 1500-2000
		- * + Early Modern English (eModE)
				+ Present –day Modern English (Pre ModE)
* Standardization
	+ Criteria for standardizing English
	+ The English common core
	+ The major idealized varieties of English
* The development of English to full functionality
	+ Science
	+ Law
	+ Technology
	+ Economics
* Emerging issues

**MODE OF DELIVERY**

* Lectures
* Demonstrations
* Tutorials
* Written and oral exercises

**INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND /OR EQUIPMENT**

* Whiteboard and Markers
* Flip Charts
* LCD Projectors
* CDs, DVDs and Tapes

**READING LIST**

Aitchison, J. (1985) *Language Change: Progress or Decay*. New York: Universe Books

Anttila, R. (1989) *Historical and Comparative Linguistics*. New York: John Benjamins

Arlotto, Anthony. (1972) *Introduction to Historical Linguistics*. Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America.

Baugh, A.C.C. ( 1978) *A History of the English Language*, 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Prentice-Hall

Bynon, Theodora. (1977) *Historical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Cassidy, F.G.,ed. (1986) *Dictionary of American Regional English*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press

Campbell, Lyle (2004) *Historical Linguistics; Edinburgh*: Edinburgh University Press

Comrie, B., Ed. (1990) *The World’s Major Languages*. New York: Oxford University Press

Hale, Mark (2007*) Historical Linguistics-- Theory and Method*; USA: Blackwell Publishing

Hock, J.H. (1986) Principles of Historical Linguistics. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Jeffers, R.J., and I Lehiste (1979) *Principles and Methods of Historical Linguistics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Lehmann, Winfred Phillip (1992*) Historical Linguistics—An Introduction* ; London : Routledge

Lyovin, A. (1997) *An Introduction to Languages of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press

Nicholas, J. (1992) *Linguistic Diversity in Space and Time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Pullum, G.K. (1981) “Languages with Object before Subject: A Comment and a Catalogue,” *Linguistics* 19:147-55.

Pyles, T. (1993) *The Origins and Development o the English Language,* 4th ed. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Renfrew, C. (1989) “ *The Origins of the Indo-European Languages*.” Scientific American 261.4: 106-114.

Ruhlen, M. (1994) *On the Origin of Languages*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press

Traugott, E.C.(1972) *A History of English Syntax*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Voegelin, C.F., and F.M. Voegelin (1977) *Classification and Index of the World’s Languages.* New York: Elsevier.

Wolfram, W. (2001)” Language Death and Dying,” *In The Handbook on Language Variation and Change,* Chambers, J.K., Trudgill, P., and Schilling-Estes, N.(eds) Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

**Historical Linguistics**

**Historical linguistics,** also called Diachronic Linguistics, the branch of [linguistics](https://www.britannica.com/science/linguistics) concerned with the study of phonological, grammatical, and semantic changes, the reconstruction of earlier stages of languages, and the discovery and application of the methods by which genetic relationships among languages can be demonstrated. Historical linguistics had its roots in the etymological speculations of classical and [medieval](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medieval) times, in the comparative study of Greek and Latin developed during the Renaissance, and in the speculations of scholars as to the language from which the other languages of the world were descended. It was only in the 19th century, however, that more scientific methods of language comparison and sufficient data on the early [Indo-European languages](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indo-European-languages) combined to establish the principles now used by historical linguists. The theories of the [Neo-grammarians](https://www.britannica.com/science/Neogrammarian), a group of German historical linguists and classical scholars who first gained prominence in the 1870s, were especially important because of the rigorous manner in which they formulated [sound](https://www.britannica.com/science/sound-physics) correspondences in the Indo-European languages. In the 20th century, historical linguists have successfully extended the application of the theories and methods of the 19th century to the classification and historical study of non-Indo-European languages. Historical linguistics, when contrasted with [synchronic linguistics](https://www.britannica.com/science/synchronic-linguistics), the study of a language at a particular point in time, is often called diachronic linguistics.

[**Linguistics:** Historical (diachronic) linguistics](https://www.britannica.com/science/linguistics/Historical-diachronic-linguistics#ref411886)

This is the scientific study of language. The word was first used in the middle of the 19th century to emphasize the difference between a newer approach to the study of language that was then developing and the more traditional approach of philology. The differences were and are largely matters of...

[**Neo-grammarian**](https://www.britannica.com/science/Neogrammarian)

This refers to any of a group of German scholars that arose around 1875; their chief tenet concerning language change was that sound laws have no exceptions. This principle was very controversial because there seemed to be several irregularities in language change not accounted for by the sound laws, such as...

[**Linguistics**](https://www.britannica.com/science/linguistics#ref411723)

The field of linguistics may be divided in terms of three dichotomies: synchronic versus diachronic, theoretical versus applied, and micro-linguistics versus macro-linguistics. A synchronic description of a language describes the language as it is at a given time; a diachronic description is concerned with the historical development of the language and the structural changes that have taken place...

**Introduction to Historical Linguistics**

Historical linguistics is the study of not only the history of languages, as the name implies, but also the study of how languages change, and how languages are related to one another. It might seem at first that this would be a rather dull, uneventful field of study, but that is far from the truth. Historical linguistics is full of lively debate and controversy (I'll point out controvercial things when they come), and occasionally some nasty words are thrown around.

The main job of historical linguists is to learn how languages are related. Generally, languages can be shown to be related by having a large number of words in common that were not borrowed (cognates). Languages often borrow words from each other, but these are usually not too difficult to tell apart from other words. When a related group of languages has been studied in enough detail, it is possible to know almost exactly how most words, sounds, and grammar rules have changed in the languages.

**History of Historical Linguistics**

People have thought about the origin of languages for a long, long time. Like other early looks into nature and the universe, the early ideas about language where at best obvious (realizing that two very similar languages were related) or lucky guesses, at worst dead wrong, and almost always ethno-centric (only paying attention to nearby languages. This, of course, wasn't always their fault, since communication was so slow. However, for example, the Greeks simply considered most languages in Europe to be "Barbarian", even though there were certainly several distinct "Barbarian" languages).

One of the earliest observations about language was by the Romans. They noticed that [Latin](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/latin.html) and Greek were similar. However, they incorrectly assumed that [Latin](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/latin.html) came from Greek. The reality is that both came from [Indo-European](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/indoeuro.html).

There were lots of people looking at languages in the middle ages. However, most of them were trying to show [Hebrew](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/hebrew.html) giving rise to all of the world's languages, specifically European languages. This never really worked, since [Hebrew](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/hebrew.html) is not directly related to Indo-European languages.

When Europeans started travelling to India about 300 years ago, they noticed that Sanskrit, the ancient literary language of India, was similar to Greek, [Latin](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/latin.html), and other languages of Europe. In the late 18th century, it was first correctly theorized that Sanskrit and the languages of Europe had all come from the same language, but that that language was no longer living. This was the beginning of [Indo-European](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/indoeuro.html). Since then, many languages from all over the world have been studied, and we are starting to get a good idea of how all the world's languages may be [related](http://www.mit.edu/~ejhanna/language/genelang.html).

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

# An Introduction to Historical Linguistics

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

"By applying the comparative method to related languages, we can postulate what that common earlier ancestor was like—we can reconstruct that language" (Lyle Campbell, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*, 2013). (Godong/robertharding/Getty Images)

Historical linguistics is the branch of [linguistics](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-are-linguistics-1691241) concerned with the development of a [language](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-language-1691218) or of languages over time. This was traditionally known as [philology](https://www.thoughtco.com/philology-definition-1691620).

The primary tool of historical linguistics is the comparative method, a way of identifying relations among languages in the absence of written records. For this reason, historical linguistics is sometimes called comparative-historical linguistics.

[Linguists](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-linguist-1691239) Silvia Luraghi and ‎Vit Bubenik point out that the "official act of birth of comparative historical linguistics is conventionally indicated in Sir William Jones' The Sanscrit Language, delivered as a lecture at the Asiatic Society in 1786, in which the author remarked that the similarities between Greek, Latin and Sanskrit hinted to a common origin, adding that such languages might also be related to Persian, Gothic and the Celtic languages" (The Bloomsbury Companion to Historical Linguistics, 2010).

### Examples and Observations

1. "Linguistic history is basically the darkest of the dark arts, the only means to conjure up the ghosts of vanished centuries. With linguistic history we reach farthest back into the mystery: humankind."
(Cola Minis, quoted by Lyle Campbell in Historical Linguistics: An Introduction, 3rd ed. Edinburgh University Press, 2013)
2. "[A] language is not some gradually and imperceptibly changing object which smoothly floats through time and space, as **historical linguistics** based on philological material all too easily suggests."
(Paul Kiparsky, 1968; quoted by Richard D. Janda and Brian D. Joseph in The Handbook of Historical Linguistics. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003)

### The Nature and Causes of Language Change

"**Historical linguistics** studies the nature and causes of [language change](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-language-change-1691096). The causes of language change find their roots in the physiological and cognitive makeup of human beings. Sound changes usually involve articulatory simplification as in the most common type, [assimilation](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-assimilation-phonetics-1689141). Analogy and reanalysis are particularly important factors in [morphological](https://www.thoughtco.com/morphology-words-term-1691407) change. Language contact resulting in [borrowing](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-borrowing-language-1689176) is another important source of language change. All components of the [grammar](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-borrowing-language-1689176), from [phonology](https://www.thoughtco.com/phonology-definition-1691623) to [semantics](https://www.thoughtco.com/semantics-linguistics-1692080), are subject to change over time. A change can simultaneously affect all instances of a particular sound or form, or it can spread through the language word by word by means of lexical diffusion. Sociological factors can play an important role in determining whether or not a linguistic innovation is ultimately adopted by the linguistic community at large. Since language change is systemic, it is possible, by identifying the changes that a particular language or [dialect](https://www.thoughtco.com/dialect-language-term-1690446) has undergone, to reconstruct linguistic history and thereby posit the earlier forms from which later forms have evolved."
(William O'Grady et al., Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction. Bedford, 2001)

### Dealing with Historical Gaps

"[O]ne fundamental issue in **historical linguistics** concerns how best to deal with the inevitable gaps and discontinuities that exist in our knowledge of attested [language varieties](https://www.thoughtco.com/language-variety-sociolinguistics-1691100) over time. . .
"One (partial) response is that--to put matters bluntly--in order to deal with gaps, we speculate about the unknown (i.e. about intermediate stages) based on the known. While we typically use loftier language to characterize this activity..., the point remains the same. In this respect, one of the relatively established aspects of language that can be exploited for historical study is our knowledge of the present, where we normally have access to far more data than could ever possibly become available for any previously attested stage (at least before the age of audio and video recording), no matter how voluminous an earlier [corpus](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-corpus-language-1689806) may be."
(Brian D. Joseph and Richard D. Janda, "On Language, Change, and Language Change." The Handbook of Historical Linguistics. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003)

**Historical linguistics**, also called **diachronic linguistics**, is the scientific study of [language change](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_change) over time.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-1) Principal concerns of historical linguistics include:[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-2)

1. to describe and account for observed changes in particular languages
2. to reconstruct the pre-history of languages and to determine their relatedness, grouping them into [language families](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_families) ([comparative linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_linguistics))
3. to develop general theories about how and why language changes
4. to describe the history of [speech communities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speech_communities)
5. to study the history of words, i.e. [etymology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etymology)

**History and Development**

Modern historical [linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistics) dates from the late 18th century. It grew out of the earlier discipline of [philology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philology),[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-3) the study of ancient texts and documents dating back to [antiquity](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/antiquity).

At first, historical linguistics served as the cornerstone of [comparative linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_linguistics) primarily as a tool for linguistic reconstruction. [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-4) Scholars were concerned chiefly with establishing language families and reconstructing prehistoric proto-languages, using the [comparative method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_method) and [internal reconstruction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internal_reconstruction). [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-5) The focus was initially on the well-known [Indo-European languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-European_languages), many of which had long written histories; the scholars also studied the [Uralic languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uralic_languages), another European language family for which less early written material exists. Since then, there has been significant comparative linguistic work expanding outside of European languages as well, such as on the [Austronesian languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austronesian_languages) and various families of [Native American languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_American_languages), among many others. Comparative linguistics is now, however, only a part of a more broadly conceived discipline of historical linguistics. For the Indo-European languages, comparative study is now a highly specialized field. Most research is being carried out on the subsequent development of these languages, in particular, the development of the modern standard varieties.

Some scholars have undertaken studies attempting to establish super-families, linking, for example, Indo-European, Uralic, and other families into [Nostratic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostratic). These attempts have not been accepted widely. The information necessary to establish relatedness becomes less available as the time depth is increased. The time-depth of linguistic methods is limited due to chance word resemblances and variations between language groups, but a limit of around 10,000 years is often assumed.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-6) The dating of the various proto-languages is also difficult; several methods are available for dating, but only approximate results can be obtained.

**Diachronic and Synchronic Analysis**

Initially, *all* modern linguistics was historical in orientation. Even the study of modern dialects involved looking at their origins. [Ferdinand de Saussure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_de_Saussure)'s distinction between [synchronic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synchronic_analysis_%28linguistics%29) and diachronic linguistics is fundamental to the present day organization of the discipline. Primacy is accorded to synchronic linguistics, and **diachronic linguistics** is defined as the study of successive synchronic stages. Saussure's clear demarcation, however, has had both defenders and critics.

In linguistics, a **synchronic analysis** is one that views linguistic phenomena only at a given time, usually the present, though a synchronic analysis of a historical language form is also possible. This may be distinguished from diachronic, which regards a phenomenon in terms of developments through time. Diachronic analysis is the main concern of historical linguistics; however, most other branches of linguistics are concerned with some form of synchronic analysis. The study of language change offers a valuable insight into the state of linguistic representation, and because all synchronic forms are the result of historically evolving diachronic changes, the ability to explain linguistic constructions necessitates a focus on diachronic processes.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-7)

In practice, a purely synchronic linguistics is not possible for any period before the invention of the [gramophone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonograph), as written records always lag behind speech in reflecting linguistic developments. Written records are difficult to date accurately before the development of the modern [title page](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Title_page). Often dating must rely on contextual historical evidence such as inscriptions, or, modern technology such as carbon dating can be used to ascertain dates of varying accuracy. Also, the work of [sociolinguists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociolinguistics) on linguistic variation has shown synchronic states are not uniform: the speech habits of older and younger speakers differ in ways that point to language change. Synchronic variation is linguistic change in progress.

Synchronic and diachronic approaches can reach quite different conclusions. For example, a [Germanic strong verb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_strong_verb) like English *sing - sang - sung* is [irregular](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regular_verb) when viewed synchronically: the native speaker's brain [processes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurolinguistics) these as learned forms, whereas the derived forms of regular verbs are processed quite differently, by the application of productive rules (for example, adding *-ed* to the basic form of a verb as in *walk - walked*). This is an insight of [psycholinguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psycholinguistics), relevant also for [language didactics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_language_acquisition), both of which are synchronic disciplines. However, a diachronic analysis will show that the strong verb is the remnant of a fully regular system of internal vowel changes, in this case, namely, the [Indo-European ablaut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-European_ablaut); historical linguistics seldom uses the category "[irregular verb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irregular_verb)".

The principal tools of research in diachronic linguistics are the [comparative method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_method) and the method of [internal reconstruction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internal_reconstruction). Less-standard techniques, such as [mass lexical comparison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_lexical_comparison), are used by some linguists to overcome the limitations of the comparative method, but most linguists regard them as unreliable.

The findings of historical linguistics are often used as a basis for hypotheses about the groupings and movements of peoples, particularly in the prehistoric period. In practice, however, it is often unclear how to integrate the linguistic evidence with the [archaeological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeological) or [genetic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetics) evidence. For example, there are numerous theories concerning the homeland and early movements of the [Proto-Indo-Europeans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-Europeans), each with its own interpretation of the archaeological record.

**Comparative Linguistics**

[Comparative linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_linguistics) (originally **comparative** [**philology**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philology)) is a branch of historical linguistics that is concerned with comparing languages in order to establish their historical relatedness. Languages may be related by convergence through [borrowing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borrowing_%28linguistics%29) or by genetic descent, thus languages can change and are also able to cross-relate.

[Genetic relatedness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetic_relationship_%28linguistics%29) implies a common origin or [proto-language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-language). Comparative linguistics has the goal of constructing [language families](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_family), reconstructing proto-languages, and specifying the changes that have resulted in the documented languages. To maintain a clear distinction between [attested language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attested_language) and reconstructed forms, comparative linguists prefix an asterisk to any form that is not found in surviving texts.

**Etymology**

[Etymology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etymology) is the study of the [history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History) of [words](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word): when they entered a language, from what source, and how their form and meaning have changed over time. A word may enter a language as a [loanword](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loanword) (as a word from one language adopted by speakers of another language), through [derivational morphology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derivational_morphology) by combining pre-existing elements in the language, by a hybrid of these two processes called [phono-semantic matching](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phono-semantic_matching), or in several other minor ways.

In languages with a long and detailed history, etymology makes use of [philology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philology), the study of how words change from culture to culture over time. Etymologists also apply the methods of [comparative linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_linguistics) to reconstruct information about languages that are too old for any direct information (such as writing) to be known. By analyzing related languages with a technique known as the [comparative method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_method), linguists can make inferences, about their shared parent language and its vocabulary. In that way, [word roots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Root_%28linguistics%29) that can be traced all the way back to the origin of, for instance, the [Indo-European](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-European_languages) [language family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_family) have been found. Although originating in the philological tradition, much current etymological research is done in [language families](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_family) for which little or no early documentation is available, such as [Uralic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uralic_languages) and [Austronesian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austronesian_languages).

**Dialectology**

[Dialectology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectology) is the scientific study of linguistic [dialect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialect), the varieties of a language that are characteristic of particular groups, based primarily on geographic distribution and their associated features. This is in contrast to variations based on social factors, which are studied in [sociolinguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociolinguistics), or variations based on time, which are studied in historical linguistics. Dialectology treats such topics as divergence of two local dialects from a common ancestor and [synchronic variation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Descriptive_linguistics).

Dialectologists are concerned with grammatical features that correspond to regional areas. Thus, they are usually dealing with populations living in specific locales for generations without moving, but also with immigrant groups bringing their languages to new settlements.

**Phonology**

[Phonology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonology) is a sub-field of linguistics which studies the [sound](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound) system of a specific language or set of languages. Whereas [phonetics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonetics) is about the physical production and [perception](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perception) of the sounds of speech, phonology describes the way sounds function within a given language or across languages.

An important part of phonology is studying which sounds are distinctive units within a language. For example, the "p" in "pin" is [aspirated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspiration_%28phonetics%29), but the "p" in "spin" is not. In English these two sounds are used in [complementary distribution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complementary_distribution) and are not used to differentiate words so they are considered [allophones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allophones) of the same [phoneme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoneme). In some other languages like [Thai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_language) and [Quechua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quechua_languages), the same difference of aspiration or non-aspiration differentiates words and so the two sounds (or [phones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phones)) are therefore considered phonemes.

In addition to the minimal meaningful sounds (the phonemes), phonology studies how sounds alternate, such as the /p/ in English, and topics such as [syllable](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syllable) structure, [stress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stress_%28linguistics%29), [accent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accent_%28dialect%29), and [intonation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intonation_%28linguistics%29).

The principles of phonological theory have also been applied to the analysis of [sign languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sign_language), but the phonological units do not consist of sounds. The principles of phonological analysis can be applied independently of [modality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modality_%28semiotics%29) because they are designed to serve as general analytical tools, not language-specific ones.

**Morphology**

[Morphology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morphology_%28linguistics%29) is the study of the formal means of expression in a language; in the context of historical linguistics, how the formal means of expression change over time; for instance, languages with complex inflectional systems tend to be subject to a simplification process. This field studies the internal structure of words as a formal means of expression.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-8)

Words as units in the lexicon are the subject matter of [lexicology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexicology). While words are generally accepted as being (with [clitics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clitic)) the smallest units of [syntax](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syntax), it is clear that, in most (if not all) languages, words can be related to other words by rules. The rules understood by the speaker reflect specific patterns (or regularities) in the way words are formed from smaller units and how those smaller units interact in speech. In this way, morphology is the branch of linguistics that studies patterns of word-formation within and across languages, and attempts to formulate rules that model the knowledge of the speakers of those languages, in the context of historical linguistics, how the means of expression change over time. See [grammaticalisation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammaticalisation).

**Syntax**

[Syntax](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syntax) is the study of the principles and rules for constructing [sentences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentence_%28linguistics%29) in [natural languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_language). The term *syntax* is used to refer directly to the rules and principles that govern the sentence structure of any individual language, as in "the [syntax of Modern Irish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_syntax)". Modern researchers in syntax attempt to [describe languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Descriptive_linguistics) in terms of such rules. Many professionals in this discipline attempt to find [general rules](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Grammar) that apply to all natural languages in the context of historical linguistics, how characteristics of sentence structure in related languages changed over time. See [grammaticalisation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammaticalisation).

**Rates of Change and Varieties of Adaptation**

Studies in historical linguistics often use the terms "[conservative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_%28language%29)" or "innovative" to characterize the extent of change occurring in a particular language or dialect as compared with related varieties. In particular, a *conservative* variety changes relatively less than an *innovative* variety. These variations in plasticity are often related to the socio-economic situation of the language speakers. An example of an innovative language would be the [American English](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_English) language because of the vast number of speakers and the open interaction these speakers have with other language groups; these changes can be seen in the terms developed for business and marketing, among other fields such as technology. The converse of the innovative language is the conservative language, and these are generally defined by their static nature and imperviousness to outside influences. Most of these languages are spoken in secluded areas that lack any other primary language speaking population, however this is not a guarantee. These descriptive terms carry no value judgment in linguistic studies, and are not used to determine any form of worthiness a language has compared to any other language.

A particularly conservative variety that preserves features that have long since vanished elsewhere is sometimes said to be "[archaic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaism)". While there are few examples of archaic language in modern society, some have survived in [set phrases](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Set_phrase) or in nursery rhymes.

**Evolutionary Context**

In terms of [evolutionary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution_%28term%29) theory, historical linguistics (as opposed to research into the [origins of human language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origin_of_language)) studies [Lamarckian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste_Lamarck) [acquired characteristics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inheritance_of_acquired_characteristics) of languages.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#cite_note-9)

**Citations and notes**

1. [Bynon 1977](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#CITEREFBynon1977):1.
2.  [Radford 1999](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics#CITEREFRadford1999), pp. 17–18
3.  *Campbell, Lyle (1998). Historical Linguistics : An Introduction. 22 George Square, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 391.* [*ISBN*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number)[*978 0 7486 4601 2*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/978_0_7486_4601_2)*.*
4.  Editors\_Introduction\_Foundations\_of\_the from: The Routledge Handbook of Historical Linguistics Routledge p. 25.
5.  Editors\_Introduction\_Foundations\_of\_the from: The Routledge Handbook of Historical Linguistics Routledge p. 25.
6.  *Baldi, Philip (May 2017).* [*"Historical Linguistics and Cognitive Science"*](http://www.personal.psu.edu/ped10/Giuli_Dussias/Publications/External/Baldi_Dussias_Rhesis_2012_GD_09_13_2012.pdf) *(PDF). Rheis, International Journal of Linguistics, Philology and Literature.* ***3–1****: 11.*
7.  Bybee, Joan L. “Diachronic Linguistics.” The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics, June 2010.
8.  A *formal language* is a set of words, i.e. finite strings of letters or symbols. The inventory from which these letters are taken is the *alphabet* through which the language is defined. A formal language is often defined by means of a [formal grammar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formal_grammar), but it does not describe their [semantics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantics) (i.e., what they mean).
9.  [*Studdert-Kennedy, Michael*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Studdert-Kennedy) *(1991). "1: Language Development from an Evolutionary Perspective". In Krasnegor, Norman A.; Rumbaugh, Duane M.; Schiefelbusch, Richard L.;* [*Studdert-Kennedy, Michael*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Studdert-Kennedy)*;* [*Thelen, Esther*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esther_Thelen)*.* [*Biological and Behavioral Determinants of Language Development*](https://books.google.com/books?id=nUnrAgAAQBAJ)*. New York: Psychology Press (published 2014). p. 6.* [*ISBN*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number)[*9781317783893*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/9781317783893)*. Retrieved 2016-12-27. [...] biological evolution does not proceed by the transmission of acquired characters across generations, and this is precisely what an evolutionary model of language change requires. We therefore must distinguish the cultural, or Lamarckian, evolution of language, a concern of historical linguistics, from its biological, or neo-Darwinian, evolution, a concern of developmental biology.*

**References**

Bernd Kortmann: *English Linguistics: Essentials*, Anglistik-Amerikanistik, Cornlesen, pp. 37–49

*Bynon, Theodora (1977).* [*Historical Linguistics*](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=A-dB-7CYMwcC&lpg=PR9&ots=EZ57pNc7Xe&dq=Historical%20linguistics&lr&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q=Historical%20linguistics&f=false)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*

*Radford, Andrew (1999). Linguistics: An Introduction. With co-authors Martin Atkinson, David Britain, Harald Clahsen, Andrew Spencer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.*

# Synchrony and Diachrony

**Synchrony** and **diachrony** are two different and complementary viewpoints in [linguistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic) analysis. A synchronic approach (from Greek συν- "together" and χρόνος "time") considers a language at a moment in time without taking its history into account. Synchronic linguistics aims at describing a language at a specific point of time, usually the present. By contrast, a [diachronic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_linguistics) approach (from δια- "through" and χρόνος "time") considers the development and evolution of a language through history. [Historical linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics) is typically a diachronic study.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synchrony_and_diachrony#cite_note-1)

The concepts were theorized by the Swiss linguist [Ferdinand de Saussure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_de_Saussure), professor of general linguistics in [Geneva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva) from 1896 to 1911, and appeared in writing in his posthumous [*Course in General Linguistics*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_in_General_Linguistics) published in 1916. In contrast with most of his predecessors, who focused on historical evolution of languages, Saussure emphasized the primacy of synchronic analysis to understand their inner functioning, though never forgetting the importance of complementary diachrony. This [dualistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dualism) opposition has been carried over into [philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy) and [sociology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology), for instance by [Roland Barthes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes) and [Jean-Paul Sartre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre). [Jacques Lacan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Lacan) also used it for [psychoanalysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoanalysis).[[*citation needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)]

# Dialectic

**Dialectic** or **dialectics** ([Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language): διαλεκτική, *dialektikḗ*), also known as the **dialectical method**, is a [discourse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discourse) between two or more people holding different [points of view](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion) about a subject but wishing to establish the [truth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth) through [reasoned](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationality) arguments.

In [philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy), dialectic or dialectical method implied a [methodology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodology) used for examining and cognition of philosophical objects. Dialectical methods demand the users to examine the objects in relation to other objects and to the whole system, and examine the objects within a dynamic, evolutionary environment. Dialectical method is usually contrasted with [metaphysical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphysical) method, which examines the objects in a separated, isolated and static environment.

Dialectical method has three main forms correspond to three developmental stages. [Naive dialectic](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Naive_dialectic&action=edit&redlink=1) emerged in [ancient history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_history), it mainly relied on intuition and personal experience with limited supporting scientific evidences. [Idealistic dialectic](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Idealistic_dialectic&action=edit&redlink=1) was the product of classic German idealism and reached its zenith in the works of [Hegel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegel), it is the first systematic form of dialectical method. [Materialistic dialectics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectical_materialism) was built mainly by [Karl Marx](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx), [Friedrich Engels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Engels) and [Vladimir Lenin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin), it adapted the Hegelian dialectic into traditional [materialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Materialism).

The term *dialectic* is not synonymous with the term [*debate*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debate). While in theory debaters are not necessarily emotionally invested in their point of view, in practice debaters frequently display an emotional commitment that may cloud rational judgment. Debates are won through a combination of persuading the opponent, proving one's argument correct, and proving the opponent's argument incorrect. Debates do not necessarily require promptly identifying a clear winner or loser; however, clear winners are frequently determined by a judge, a jury or [group consensus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus_decision-making). The term *dialectics* is also not synonymous with the term [*rhetoric*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric), a method or art of discourse that seeks to persuade, inform, or motivate an audience.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-1) Concepts, like "[*logos*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logos#Aristotle.27_rhetorical_logos)" or rational appeal, "[*pathos*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pathos)" or emotional appeal, and "[*ethos*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethos#Rhetoric)" or ethical appeal, are intentionally used by rhetoricians to persuade an audience.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-2)

[Socrates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates) favoured truth as the highest value, proposing that it could be discovered through reason and logic in discussion: ergo, *dialectic*. Socrates valued rationality (appealing to logic, not emotion) as the proper means for persuasion, the discovery of truth, and the determinant for one's actions. To Socrates, *truth*, not [*aretē*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aret%C4%93) (moral virtue), was the greater good, and each person should, above all else, seek truth to guide one's life. Therefore, Socrates opposed the Sophists and their teaching of rhetoric as art and as emotional oratory requiring neither logic nor proof.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-3) Different forms of dialectical reasoning have emerged throughout history from the [Indosphere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indosphere) ([Greater India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_India)) and [the West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_world) (Europe). These forms include the [Socratic method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method), [Hindu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu), [Buddhist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upaya), [Medieval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval), [Hegelian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegelian_dialectic) dialectics, [Marxist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist), [Talmudic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilpul), and [Neo-orthodoxy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-orthodoxy).

## Principles

The purpose of the dialectic method of reasoning is resolution of [disagreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disagreement) through [rational](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationality) discussion, and, ultimately, the search for truth.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-4)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-5) One way to proceed—the [Socratic method](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method)—is to show that a given [hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypothesis) (with other admissions) leads to a [contradiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contradiction); thus, forcing the withdrawal of the hypothesis as a candidate for [truth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth) (see [reductio ad absurdum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reductio_ad_absurdum)). Another dialectical resolution of disagreement is by denying a [presupposition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presupposition) of the contending thesis and antithesis; thereby, proceeding to [*sublation*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aufheben) (transcendence) to *synthesis*, a third thesis.

[Fichtean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Gottlieb_Fichte)[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-6)/Hegelian dialectics is based upon four concepts:

1. Everything is transient and finite, existing in the medium of time.
2. Everything is composed of contradictions (opposing forces).
3. Gradual changes lead to crises, turning points when one force overcomes its opponent force (quantitative change leads to qualitative change).
4. Change is [helical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helix) (periodic without returning to the same position), not circular (negation of the negation).[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Mills2005-7)

The concept of *dialectic* (as a [unity of opposites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unity_of_opposites)) existed in the philosophy of [Heraclitus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclitus) of [Ephesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephesus), who proposed that everything is in constant change, as a result of inner strife and opposition.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-8)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-9)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-10) Hence, the history of the dialectical method is the history of philosophy.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-11)

## Western Dialectical Forms

### Classical Philosophy

In [classical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Greece) [philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy), dialectic (διαλεκτική) is a form of reasoning based upon dialogue of arguments and counter-arguments, advocating [*propositions*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proposition) ([theses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thesis%2C_antithesis%2C_synthesis)) and *counter-propositions* ([antitheses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antithesis)). The outcome of such a dialectic might be the refutation of a relevant proposition, or of a synthesis, or a combination of the opposing assertions, or a qualitative improvement of the dialogue.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-12)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-13)

Moreover, the term "dialectic" owes much of its prestige to its role in the philosophies of [Socrates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates) and [Plato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato), in the Greek [Classical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Greece) period (5th to 4th centuries BCE). [Aristotle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle) said that it was the pre-Socratic philosopher [Zeno of Elea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeno_of_Elea) who invented dialectic, of which the dialogues of Plato are the examples of the Socratic dialectical method.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-14)

According to [Kant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant), however, the ancient Greeks used the word "dialectic" to signify the logic of false appearance or semblance. To the Ancients, "it was nothing but the logic of illusion. It was a sophistic art of giving to one's ignorance, indeed even to one's intentional tricks, the outward appearance of truth, by imitating the thorough, accurate method which logic always requires, and by using its topic as a cloak for every empty assertion."[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-15)

#### Socratic dialogue

In Plato's dialogues and other Socratic dialogues, Socrates attempts to examine someone's beliefs, at times even [first principles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_principles) or [premises](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premise) by which we all reason and argue. Socrates typically argues by cross-examining his interlocutor's claims and premises in order to draw out a [contradiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contradiction) or inconsistency among them. According to Plato, the rational detection of error amounts to finding the proof of the antithesis.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-16) However, important as this objective is, the principal aim of Socratic activity seems to be to improve the soul of his interlocutors, by freeing them from unrecognized errors.

For example, in the [*Euthyphro*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euthyphro), Socrates asks [Euthyphro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euthyphro_%28prophet%29) to provide a definition of piety. Euthyphro replies that the pious is that which is loved by the gods. But, Socrates also has Euthyphro agreeing that the gods are quarrelsome and their quarrels, like human quarrels, concern objects of love or hatred. Therefore, Socrates reasons, at least one thing exists that certain gods love but other gods hate. Again, Euthyphro agrees. Socrates concludes that if Euthyphro's definition of piety is acceptable, then there must exist at least one thing that is both pious and impious (as it is both loved and hated by the gods)—which Euthyphro admits is absurd. Thus, Euthyphro is brought to a realization by this dialectical method that his definition of piety is not sufficiently meaningful.

Dialectic can be defined as a, "mode of thought, or a philosophic medium, through which contradiction becomes a starting point (rather than a dead end) for contemplation"[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-17) Socrates proposed this form of dialectic through a Socratic method termed [elenchus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Method_of_elenchus). To achieve the ultimate truth of opinions, hence dialectic, Socrates refuted propositions by proving his own statements true. In common cases, Socrates used enthymemes as the foundation of his argument. Discourse was applied to guide his reasoned arguments until the interlocutors had no other choice but to agree with him, conclusively contradicting their original theses. Therefore, Socrates, in result, would have reached ultimate truth.

For example, in Plato's Gorgias, dialectic occurs between Socrates, the Sophist Gorgias, and two men, Polus and Callicles. Because Socrates' ultimate goal was to reach true knowledge, he was even willing to change his own views in order to arrive at the truth. The fundamental goal of dialectic, in this instance, was to establish a precise definition of the subject (in this case, rhetoric) and with the use of argumentation and questioning, make the subject even more precise. In the Gorgias, Socrates reaches the truth by asking a series of questions and in return, receiving short, clear answers.

Socrates asks Gorgias if he who has learned carpentering is a carpenter, and if he who has learned music is a musician, and if he who has learned medicine is a physician, and so forth. Gorgias one way or another replies "yes," to all of these questions. Socrates then continues by asking Gorgias if he believes that a just man will always desire to do what is just and never intend to do injustice. Yet again, Gorgias replies, "yes." Socrates then brings up the fact that earlier in their conversation Gorgias stated that rhetoricians are just men. Gorgias agrees. In return, Socrates contradicts Gorgias' statements, because Gorgias had implied that if a rhetorician uses rhetoric for injustices, the teacher should not be at fault. If this were to occur, then a rhetorician would in fact not be a just man. Socrates discovered the inconsistency in Gorgias' statements and ends the excerpt by stating "there will be a great deal of discussion, before we get at the truth of all this."

This example demonstrates how dialectic is used as a method to maneuver people into contradicting their own theses. Reasoned argumentative discourse furthers the establishment of the truth. Dialectic, dissimilar to debates, naturally comes to an end. The ultimate truth will be arrived at and contradiction diminished.

There is another interpretation of the dialectic, as a method of intuition suggested in The Republic.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-18) Simon Blackburn writes that the dialectic in this sense is used to understand "the total process of enlightenment, whereby the philosopher is educated so as to achieve knowledge of the supreme good, the Form of the Good".[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-19)

#### Aristotle

Aristotle stresses that rhetoric is closely related to dialectic. He offers several formulas to describe this affinity between the two disciplines: first of all, rhetoric is said to be a “counterpart” (antistrophos) to dialectic (Rhet. I.1, 1354a1); (ii) it is also called an “outgrowth” (paraphues ti) of dialectic and the study of character (Rhet. I.2, 1356a25f.); finally, Aristotle says that rhetoric is part of dialectic and resembles it (Rhet. I.2, 1356a30f.). In saying that rhetoric is a counterpart to dialectic, Aristotle obviously alludes to Plato's Gorgias (464bff.), where rhetoric is ironically defined as a counterpart to cookery in the soul. Since, in this passage, Plato uses the word ‘antistrophos’ to designate an analogy, it is likely that Aristotle wants to express a kind of analogy too: what dialectic is for the (private or academic) practice of attacking and maintaining an argument, rhetoric is for the (public) practice of defending oneself or accusing an opponent. The analogy to dialectic has important implications for the status of rhetoric. Plato argued in his Gorgias that rhetoric cannot be an art (technê), since it is not related to a definite subject, while real arts are defined by their specific subjects, as e.g. medicine or shoemaking are defined by their products, i.e., health and shoes.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-20)

### Medieval philosophy

Dialectics (also called logic) was one of the three liberal arts taught in [medieval universities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_universities) as part of the [trivium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trivium_%28education%29). The trivium also included [rhetoric](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric) and [grammar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar).[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-21)[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-22)[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-23)[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Herbermann-24)

Based mainly on [Aristotle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle), the first medieval philosopher to work on dialectics was [Boethius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boethius).[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-25) After him, many scholastic philosophers also made use of dialectics in their works, such as [Abelard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abelard),[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-26) [William of Sherwood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_of_Sherwood),[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-27) [Garlandus Compotista](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garlandus_Compotista),[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-28) [Walter Burley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Burley), Roger Swyneshed, [William of Ockham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_of_Ockham),[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-29) and [Thomas Aquinas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Aquinas).[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-30)

This dialectic was formed as follows:

1. The Question to be determined
2. The principal objections to the question
3. An argument in favor of the Question, traditionally a single argument ("On the contrary...")
4. The determination of the Question after weighing the evidence. ("I answer that...")
5. The replies to each objection

### Modern philosophy

The concept of dialectics was given new life by [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Wilhelm_Friedrich_Hegel) (following [Johann Gottlieb Fichte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Gottlieb_Fichte)), whose dialectically synthetic model of nature and of history made it, as it were, a fundamental aspect of the nature of reality (instead of regarding the contradictions into which dialectics leads as a sign of the sterility of the dialectical method, as [Immanuel Kant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant) tended to do in his [*Critique of Pure Reason*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critique_of_Pure_Reason)).[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-31)[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-32) In the mid-19th century, the concept of "dialectic" was appropriated by [Karl Marx](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx) (see, for example, [*Das Kapital*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Kapital), published in 1867) and [Friedrich Engels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Engels) and retooled in a dynamic, nonidealistic manner. It would also become a crucial part of later representations of Marxism as a philosophy of [dialectical materialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectical_materialism). These representations often contrasted dramatically[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-33) and led to vigorous debate among different Marxist groupings, leading some prominent Marxists to give up on the idea of dialectics completely.[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-34) Thus this concept has played a prominent role on the world stage and in [world history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_world). In contemporary [polemics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polemics), "dialectics" may also refer to an understanding of how we can or should perceive the world ([epistemology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistemology)); an assertion that the nature of the world outside one's perception is interconnected, contradictory, and dynamic ([ontology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontology)); or it can refer to a method of presentation of ideas and conclusions ([discourse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discourse)). According to Hegel, "dialectic" is the method by which human history unfolds; that is to say, history progresses as a dialectical process.

#### Hegelian dialectic

Hegelian dialectic, usually presented in a threefold manner, was stated by [Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Moritz_Chalyb%C3%A4us)[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-35) as comprising three dialectical stages of development: a [thesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thesis%2C_antithesis%2C_synthesis), giving rise to its reaction, an [antithesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thesis%2C_antithesis%2C_synthesis), which contradicts or negates the thesis, and the tension between the two being resolved by means of a [synthesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thesis%2C_antithesis%2C_synthesis). In more simplistic terms, one can consider it thus; problem → reaction → solution. Although this model is often named after Hegel, he himself never used that specific formulation. Hegel ascribed that terminology to Kant.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-36) Carrying on Kant's work, [Fichte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Gottlieb_Fichte) greatly elaborated on the synthesis model, and popularized it.

On the other hand, Hegel did use a three-valued logical model that is very similar to the antithesis model, but Hegel's most usual terms were: Abstract-Negative-Concrete. Hegel used this writing model as a backbone to accompany his points in many of his works.

The formula, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, does not explain why the thesis requires an antithesis. However, the formula, abstract-negative-concrete, suggests a flaw, or perhaps an incompleteness, in any initial thesis—it is too abstract and lacks the negative of trial, error, and experience. For Hegel, the concrete, the synthesis, the absolute, must always pass through the phase of the negative, in the journey to completion, that is, mediation. This is the essence of what is popularly called Hegelian Dialectics.

According to the German philosopher [Walter Kaufmann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Kaufmann_%28philosopher%29):

"Fichte introduced into German philosophy the three-step of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, using these three terms. Schelling took up this terminology. *Hegel did not.* He never once used these three terms together to designate three stages in an argument or account in any of his books. And they do not help us understand his *Phenomenology*, his *Logic*, or his philosophy of history; they impede any open-minded comprehension of what he does by forcing it into a scheme which was available to him and which he deliberately spurned [...] The mechanical formalism [...] Hegel derides expressly and at some length in the preface to the *Phenomenology.*[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-37)[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-38)

Kaufmann also cites Hegel's criticism of the triad model commonly misattributed to him, adding that "the only place where Hegel uses the three terms together occurs in his lectures on the history of philosophy, on the last page but one of the section on Kant—where Hegel roundly reproaches Kant for having 'everywhere posited thesis, antithesis, synthesis'".[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-39)

To describe the activity of overcoming the negative, Hegel also often used the term [*Aufhebung*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aufheben), variously translated into English as "sublation" or "overcoming," to conceive of the working of the dialectic. Roughly, the term indicates preserving the useful portion of an idea, thing, society, etc., while moving beyond its limitations. ([Jacques Derrida](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Derrida)'s preferred French translation of the term was *relever*.)[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-40)

In the [*Logic*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_of_Logic), for instance, Hegel describes a dialectic of [existence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existence): first, existence must be posited as pure Being (*Sein*); but pure Being, upon examination, is found to be indistinguishable from Nothing (*Nichts*). When it is realized that what is coming into being is, at the same time, also returning to nothing (in life, for example, one's living is also a dying), both Being and Nothing are united as Becoming.[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-41)

As in the Socratic dialectic, Hegel claimed to proceed by making implicit contradictions explicit: each stage of the process is the product of contradictions inherent or implicit in the preceding stage. For Hegel, the whole of history is one tremendous dialectic, major stages of which chart a progression from self-alienation as [slavery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master-slave_dialectic) to self-unification and realization as the [rational](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationality) [constitutional state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_state) of free and equal citizens. The Hegelian dialectic cannot be mechanically applied for any chosen thesis. Critics argue that the selection of any antithesis, other than the logical negation of the thesis, is subjective. Then, if the logical negation is used as the antithesis, there is no rigorous way to derive a synthesis. In practice, when an antithesis is selected to suit the user's subjective purpose, the resulting "contradictions" are [rhetorical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric), not logical, and the resulting synthesis is not rigorously defensible against a multitude of other possible syntheses. The problem with the Fichtean "thesis–antithesis–synthesis" model is that it implies that contradictions or negations come from outside of things. Hegel's point is that they are inherent in and internal to things. This conception of dialectics derives ultimately from [Heraclitus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclitus).

Hegel stated that the purpose of dialectics is "to study things in their own being and movement and thus to demonstrate the finitude of the partial categories of understanding."[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-42)

One important dialectical principle for Hegel is the transition from quantity to quality, which he terms the Measure. The measure is the qualitative quantum, the quantum is the existence of quantity.[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-43)

"The identity between quantity and quality, which is found in Measure, is at first only implicit, and not yet explicitly realised. In other words, these two categories, which unite in Measure, each claim an independent authority. On the one hand, the quantitative features of existence may be altered, without affecting its quality. On the other hand, this increase and diminution, immaterial though it be, has its limit, by exceeding which the quality suffers change. [...] But if the quantity present in measure exceeds a certain limit, the quality corresponding to it is also put in abeyance. This however is not a negation of quality altogether, but only of this definite quality, the place of which is at once occupied by another. This process of measure, which appears alternately as a mere change in quantity and then as a sudden revulsion of quantity into quality, may be envisaged under the figure of a nodal (knotted) line".[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-44)

As an example, Hegel mentions the states of aggregation of water: "Thus the temperature of water is, in the first place, a point of no consequence in respect of its liquidity: still with the increase or diminution of the temperature of the liquid water, there comes a point where this state of cohesion suffers a qualitative change, and the water is converted into steam or ice".[[45]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-45) As other examples Hegel mentions the reaching of a point where a single additional grain makes a heap of wheat; or where the bald tail is produced, if we continue plucking out single hairs.

Another important principle for Hegel is the negation of the negation, which he also terms *Aufhebung* (sublation): Something is only what it is in its relation to another, but by the negation of the negation this something incorporates the other into itself. The dialectical movement involves two moments that negate each other, something and its other. As a result of the negation of the negation, "something becomes its other; this other is itself something; therefore it likewise becomes an other, and so on ad infinitum".[[46]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-46) Something in its passage into other only joins with itself, it is self-related.[[47]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-47) In becoming there are two moments:[[48]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-48) coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be: by sublation, i.e., negation of the negation, being passes over into nothing, it ceases to be, but something new shows up, is coming to be. What is sublated (*aufgehoben*) on the one hand ceases to be and is put to an end, but on the other hand it is preserved and maintained.[[49]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-49) In dialectics, a totality transforms itself; it is self-related, then self-forgetful, relieving the original tension.

#### Marxist dialectic

[Karl Marx](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx) and [Friedrich Engels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Engels) proposed that G.F. Hegel had rendered philosophy too abstractly [ideal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism):

*The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.*[*[50]*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-50)

In contradiction to Hegelian idealism, Karl Marx presented [dialectical materialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectical_materialism) (Marxist dialectic):

*My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the* [*demiurgos*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demiurge) *of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought*.[[51]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-51)

In Marxism, the dialectical method of historical study became intertwined with [historical materialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_materialism), the school of thought exemplified by the works of Marx, Engels, and [Vladimir Lenin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin). In the USSR, under [Joseph Stalin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin), Marxist dialectics became "diamat" (short for dialectical materialism), a theory emphasizing the primacy of the material way of life; social "praxis" over all forms of social consciousness; and the secondary, dependent character of the "ideal". The term "dialectical materialism" was coined by the 19th-century social theorist [Joseph Dietzgen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Dietzgen) who used the theory to explain the nature of [socialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism) and social development. The original populariser of Marxism in Russia, [Georgi Plekhanov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgi_Plekhanov) used the terms "dialectical materialism" and "historical materialism" interchangeably. For Lenin, the primary feature of Marx's "dialectical materialism" (Lenin's term) was its application of materialist philosophy to history and social sciences. Lenin's main input in the philosophy of dialectical materialism was his theory of reflection, which presented human consciousness as a dynamic reflection of the objective material world that fully shapes its contents and structure. Later, Stalin's works on the subject established a rigid and formalistic division of Marxist–Leninist theory in the dialectical materialism and historical materialism parts. While the first was supposed to be the key method and theory of the philosophy of nature, the second was the Soviet version of the philosophy of history.

A dialectical method was fundamental to Marxist politics, e.g., the works of [Karl Korsch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Korsch), [Georg Lukács](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Luk%C3%A1cs) and certain members of the [Frankfurt School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt_School). Soviet academics, notably [Evald Ilyenkov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evald_Ilyenkov) and [Zaid Orudzhev](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaid_Orudzhev), continued pursuing unorthodox philosophic study of Marxist dialectics; likewise in the West, notably the philosopher [Bertell Ollman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertell_Ollman) at [New York University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_University).

Friedrich Engels proposed that Nature is dialectical, thus, in [Anti-Dühring](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-D%C3%BChring) he said that the negation of negation is:

A very simple process, which is taking place everywhere and every day, which any child can understand as soon as it is stripped of the veil of mystery in which it was enveloped by the old [idealist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism) philosophy.[[52]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-52)

In [*Dialectics of Nature*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectics_of_Nature), Engels said:

*Probably the same gentlemen who up to now have decried the transformation of quantity `into quality as* [*mysticism*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism) *and incomprehensible* [*transcendentalism*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendentalism) *will now declare that it is indeed something quite self-evident, trivial, and commonplace, which they have long employed, and so they have been taught nothing new. But to have formulated for the first time in its universally valid form a general law of development of Nature, society, and thought, will always remain an act of historic importance.*[*[53]*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-53)

Marxist dialectics is exemplified in [*Das Kapital*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Kapital) (Capital), which outlines two central theories: (i) surplus value and (ii) the materialist conception of history; Marx explains dialectical materialism:

In its rational form, it is a scandal and abomination to [bourgeoisdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeoisie) and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time, also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.[[54]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-54)

[Class struggle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Class_struggle) is the central contradiction to be resolved by Marxist dialectics, because of its central role in the social and political lives of a society. Nonetheless, Marx and Marxists developed the concept of class struggle to comprehend the dialectical contradictions between mental and manual labor, and between town and country. Hence, philosophic contradiction is central to the development of dialectics – the progress from quantity to quality, the acceleration of gradual social change; the negation of the initial development of the *status quo*; the negation of that negation; and the high-level recurrence of features of the original *status quo*. In the USSR, Progress Publishers issued anthologies of dialectical materialism by Lenin, wherein he also quotes Marx and Engels:

As the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development, and the richest in content, Hegelian dialectics was considered by Marx and Engels the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy.... "The great basic thought", Engels writes, "that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things, apparently stable no less than their mind images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away... this great fundamental thought has, especially since the time of Hegel, so thoroughly permeated ordinary consciousness that, in its generality, it is now scarcely ever contradicted.

But, to acknowledge this fundamental thought in words, and to apply it in reality in detail to each domain of investigation, are two different things.... For dialectical philosophy nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it, except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher. And dialectical philosophy, itself, is nothing more than the mere reflection of this process in the thinking brain." Thus, according to Marx, dialectics is "the science of the general laws of motion both of the external world and of human thought".[[55]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Lenin.2C_V.I._page_7-9-55)

Lenin describes his dialectical understanding of the concept of *development*:

*A development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis ("the negation of the negation"), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; "breaks in continuity"; the transformation of quantity into quality; inner impulses towards development, imparted by the contradiction and conflict of the various forces and tendencies acting on a given body, or within a given phenomenon, or within a given society; the interdependence and the closest and indissoluble connection between all aspects of any phenomenon (history constantly revealing ever new aspects), a connection that provides a uniform, and universal process of motion, one that follows definite laws – these are some of the features of dialectics as a doctrine of development that is richer than the conventional one.*[*[55]*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Lenin.2C_V.I._page_7-9-55)

## Indian forms

### Indian continental debate: an intra- and inter-Dharmic dialectic

Anacker (2005: p. 20), in the introduction to his translation of seven works by the Buddhist monk [Vasubandhu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasubandhu) ([fl.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floruit) 4th century), a famed [dialectician](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectician) of the [Gupta Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gupta_Empire), contextualizes the prestige of dialectic and cut-throat debate in classical India and makes references to the possibly apocryphal story of the banishment of [Moheyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moheyan) post-debate with [Kamalaśīla](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamala%C5%9B%C4%ABla) (fl. 713–763):

Philosophical debating was in classical India often a spectator-sport, much as contests of poetry-improvisation were in Germany in its High Middle Ages, and as they still are in the Telugu country today. The king himself was often the judge at these debates, and loss to an opponent could have serious consequences. To take an atrociously extreme example, when the Tamil Śaivite Ñānasambandar Nāyanār defeated the Jain ācāryas in Madurai before the Pāṇḍya King Māravarman Avaniśūlāmani (620-645) this debate is said to have resulted in the impalement of 8000 Jains, an event still celebrated in the Mīnāksi Temple of Madurai today. Usually, the results were not so drastic; they could mean formal recognition by the defeated side of the superiority of the winning party, forced conversions, or, as in the case of the [*Council of Lhasa*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Lhasa), which was conducted by Indians, banishment of the losers.[[56]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-56)

#### Brahmana/Vedic/Hindu dialectic

While Western philosophy traces dialectics to ancient Greek thought of [Socrates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates) and [Plato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato), the idea of tension between two opposing forces leading to synthesis is much older and present in Hindu Philosophy.[[57]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-ErnestGreer2009-57) Indian philosophy, for the most part subsumed within the [Indian religions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_religions), has an ancient tradition of dialectic polemics. The two complements, "[purusha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purusha)" (the active cause) and the "[prakriti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prakriti)" (the passive nature) brings everything into existence. They follow the "rta", the [Dharma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma) (Universal Law of Nature).

#### Jain dialectic

Anekantavada and Syadvada are the sophisticated dialectic traditions developed by the Jains to arrive at truth. As per [Jainism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jainism), the truth or the reality is perceived differently from different points of view, and that no single point of view is the complete truth.[[58]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-58)[[59]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-59) Jain doctrine of Anekantavada states that an object has infinite modes of existence and qualities and, as such, they cannot be completely perceived in all its aspects and manifestations, due to the inherent limitations of being human. Only the [Kevalis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevala_Jnana)—the omniscient beings—can comprehend the object in all its aspects and manifestations, and that all others are capable of knowing only a part of it. Consequently, no one view can claim to represent the absolute truth. According to Jains, the ultimate principle should always be logical and no principle can be devoid of logic or reason.[[60]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Duli-60) Thus one finds in the [Jain texts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AJain_texts), deliberative exhortations on any subject in all its facts, may they be constructive or obstructive, inferential or analytical, enlightening or destructive.[[61]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-61)

Syādvāda is a theory of conditioned predication that provides an expression to anekānta by recommending that epithet *Syād* be attached to every expression.[[62]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-62) Syādvāda is not only an extension of Anekānta [ontology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontology), but a separate system of logic capable of standing on its own force. The Sanskrit etymological root of the term Syād is "perhaps" or "maybe", but in context of syādvāda, it means "in some ways" or "from a perspective." As reality is complex, no single proposition can express the nature of reality fully. Thus the term "syāt" should be prefixed before each proposition giving it a conditional point of view and thus removing any dogmatism in the statement.[[63]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-63) Since it ensures that each statement is expressed from seven different conditional and relative view points or propositions, it is known as theory of conditioned predication. These seven propositions also known as [saptabhangi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saptabhangi) are:[[64]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-grimes-64)

1. ***syād-asti***: "in some ways it is"
2. ***syād-nāsti***: "in some ways it is not"
3. ***syād-asti-nāsti***: "in some ways it is and it is not"
4. ***syād-asti-avaktavyaḥ***: "in some ways it is and it is indescribable"
5. ***syād-nāsti-avaktavyaḥ***: "in some ways it is not and it is indescribable"
6. ***syād-asti-nāsti-avaktavyaḥ***: "in some ways it is, it is not and it is indescribable"
7. ***syād-avaktavyaḥ***: "in some ways it is indescribable"

#### Buddhist dialectic

Buddhism has developed sophisticated, and sometimes highly institutionalized traditions of dialectics during its long history. [Nalanda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nalanda) University, and later the Gelugpa Buddhism of Tibet, are examples. The historical development and clarification of Buddhist doctrine and [polemics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polemics), through dialectics and formal debate, is well documented.[[*citation needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)] [Buddhist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist) doctrine was rigorously critiqued (though not ultimately refuted) in the 2nd century by [Nagarjuna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagarjuna), whose uncompromisingly logical approach to the realisation of truth, became the basis for the development of a vital stream of Buddhist thought. This dialectical approach of Buddhism, to the elucidation and articulation of an account of the Cosmos as the truth it really is, became known as the Perfection of Wisdom and was later developed by other notable thinkers, such as [Dignaga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignaga) and [Dharmakirti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharmakirti) (between 500 and 700). The dialectical method of truth-seeking is evident throughout the traditions of [Madhyamaka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madhyamaka), [Yogacara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yogacara), and [Tantric Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vajrayana). [Trisong Detsen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trisong_Detsen), and later [Je Tsongkhapa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Je_Tsongkhapa), championed the value of dialectic and of formalised training in debate in Tibet.

## Dialectical theology

[Neo-orthodoxy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-orthodoxy), in Europe also known as theology of crisis and dialectical theology,[[65]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-BR1-65)[[66]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-BR2-66) is an approach to [theology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theology) in [Protestantism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism) that was developed in the aftermath of the [First World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War) (1914–1918). It is characterized as a reaction against doctrines of [19th-century](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_the_19th_century) [liberal theology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Christianity) and a more positive reevaluation of the teachings of the [Reformation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant_Reformation), much of which had been in decline (especially in western Europe) since the late [18th century](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_the_18th_century).[[67]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-MW-67) It is primarily associated with two [Swiss](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swiss_people) professors and pastors, [Karl Barth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Barth)[[68]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-68) (1886–1968) and [Emil Brunner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emil_Brunner) (1899–1966),[[65]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-BR1-65)[[66]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-BR2-66) even though Barth himself expressed his unease in the use of the term.[[69]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-69)

In dialectical theology the difference and opposition between God and human beings is stressed in such a way that all human attempts at overcoming this opposition through moral, religious or philosophical idealism must be characterized as 'sin'. In the death of Christ humanity is negated and overcome, but this judgment also points forwards to the resurrection in which humanity is reestablished in Christ. For Barth this meant that only through God's 'no' to everything human can his 'yes' be perceived. Applied to traditional themes of Protestant theology, such as double predestination, this means that election and reprobation cannot be viewed as a quantitative limitation of God's action. Rather it must be seen as its "qualitative definition".[[70]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-70) As Christ bore the rejection as well as the election of God for all humanity, every person is subject to both aspects of God's double predestination.

## Dialectical method and dualism

Another way to understand dialectics is to view it as a method of thinking to overcome formal [dualism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dualism) and [monistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monism) [reductionism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reductionism).[[71]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-71) For example, formal dualism regards the opposites as mutually exclusive entities, whilst monism finds each to be an [epiphenomenon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphenomenon) of the other. Dialectical thinking rejects both views. The dialectical method requires focus on both at the same time. It looks for a transcendence of the opposites entailing a leap of the imagination to a higher level, which (1) provides justification for rejecting both alternatives as false and/or (2) helps elucidate a real but previously veiled integral relationship between apparent opposites that have been kept apart and regarded as distinct. For example, the [superposition principle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superposition_principle) of [quantum physics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_physics) can be explained using the dialectical method of thinking—likewise the example below from [dialectical biology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectical_biology). Such examples showing the relationship of the dialectic method of thinking to the scientific method to a large part negates the criticism of Popper (see text below) that the two are mutually exclusive. The dialectic method also examines false alternatives presented by formal dualism (materialism vs idealism; rationalism vs empiricism; mind vs body, etc.) and looks for ways to transcend the opposites and form synthesis. In the dialectical method, both have something in common, and understanding of the parts requires understanding their relationship with the whole system. The dialectical method thus views the whole of reality as an evolving process.

## Criticisms

Dialectics has become central to "Continental" philosophy, but it plays no part in "Anglo-American" philosophy. In other words, on the continent of Europe, dialectics has entered intellectual culture as what might be called a legitimate part of thought and philosophy, whereas in America and Britain, the dialectic plays no discernible part in the intellectual culture, which instead tends toward [positivism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positivism). A prime example of the European tradition is [Jean-Paul Sartre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre)'s [*Critique of Dialectical Reason*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critique_of_Dialectical_Reason), which is very different from the works of Popper, whose philosophy was for a time highly influential in the UK where he resided (see below). Sartre states:

"[Existentialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism), like [Marxism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism), addresses itself to experience in order to discover there concrete syntheses. It can conceive of these syntheses only within a moving, dialectical totalisation, which is nothing else but history or—from the strictly cultural point of view adopted here—'philosophy-becoming-the world'."[[72]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-72)

[Karl Popper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Popper) has attacked the dialectic repeatedly. In 1937 he wrote and delivered a paper entitled "What Is Dialectic?" in which he attacked the dialectical method for its willingness "to put up with contradictions".[[73]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-73) Popper concluded the essay with these words: "The whole development of dialectic should be a warning against the dangers inherent in philosophical system-building. It should remind us that [philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy) should not be made a basis for any sort of scientific system and that philosophers should be much more modest in their claims. One task which they can fulfill quite usefully is the study of the critical [methods of science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method)" (Ibid., p. 335).

In chapter 12 of volume 2 of [*The Open Society and Its Enemies*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Open_Society_and_Its_Enemies) (1944; 5th rev. ed., 1966) Popper unleashed a famous attack on Hegelian dialectics, in which he held that Hegel's thought (unjustly, in the view of some philosophers, such as [Walter Kaufmann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Kaufmann_%28philosopher%29),[[74]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-74)) was to some degree responsible for facilitating the rise of [fascism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fascism) in Europe by encouraging and justifying [irrationalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistemology#Irrationalism). In section 17 of his 1961 "addenda" to *The Open Society*, entitled "Facts, Standards and Truth: A Further Criticism of Relativism," Popper refused to moderate his criticism of the Hegelian dialectic, arguing that it "played a major role in the downfall of [the liberal movement in Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic),... by contributing to [historicism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicism) and to an identification of might and right, encouraged [totalitarian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Totalitarianism) modes of thought.  . . . [and] undermined and eventually lowered the traditional standards of intellectual responsibility and honesty".[[75]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-75)

The philosopher of science and physicist [Mario Bunge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mario_Bunge) repeatedly criticized Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, calling them "fuzzy and remote from science"[[76]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-76) and a "disastrous legacy",[[77]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Bunge_2012-77) and he concluded: "The so-called laws of dialectics, such as formulated by Engels (1940, 1954) and Lenin (1947, 1981), are false insofar as they are intelligible."[[77]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Bunge_2012-77)

## Formalism

In the past few decades, European and American logicians have attempted to provide mathematical foundations for dialectical logic or [argument](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_%28logic%29).[[78]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Eemeren-78):201–372 There had been pre-formal and partially-formal treatises on argument and dialectic, from authors such as [Stephen Toulmin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Toulmin) (*The Uses of Argument*),[[78]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Eemeren-78):203–256 [Nicholas Rescher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_Rescher) (*Dialectics*),[[78]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Eemeren-78):330–336 and van Eemeren and Grootendorst ([pragma-dialectics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragma-dialectics)).[[78]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Eemeren-78):517–614 One can include the communities of [informal logic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Informal_logic) and [paraconsistent logic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraconsistent_logic).[[78]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-Eemeren-78):373–424 However, building on theories of [defeasible reasoning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defeasible_reasoning) (see [John L. Pollock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_L._Pollock)), systems have been built that define well-formedness of arguments, rules governing the process of introducing arguments based on fixed assumptions, and rules for shifting burden. Many of these logics appear in the special area of [artificial intelligence and law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_intelligence_and_law), though the computer scientists' interest in formalizing dialectic originates in a desire to build [decision support](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decision_support) and computer-supported collaborative work systems.[[79]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic#cite_note-79)

## Further reading

Biel, R. and Mu-Jeong Kho (2009) "[The Issue of Energy within a Dialectical Approach to the Regulationist Problematique](http://webu2.upmf-grenoble.fr/regulation/wp/document/RR_serieID_2009-1.pdf)," Recherches & Régulation Working Papers, RR Série ID 2009-1, Association Recherche & Régulation: 1-21.

McKeon, R. (1954) "Dialectic and Political Thought and Action." Ethics 65, No. 1: 1-33.

Postan, M. (1962) "Function and Dialectic in Economic History," The Economic History Review, No. 3.

Spranzi, Marta (2011). *The Art of Dialectic between Dialogue and Rhetoric: The Aristotelian Tradition*, Philadelphi: John Benjamins.

APPENDIX

**KAMPALA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

**UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS 2019/2020**

**YEAR THREE SEMESTER ONE**

**COURSE : MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH/ MASTER OF LINGUISTICS**

**SUBJECT : HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS**

**CODE : LIN 7304**

**DATE : November December 2019**

**TIME : 3 HOURS**

**INSTRUCTIONS : Answer ANY THREE questions.**

1. Historical linguistics, also called Diachronic Linguistics, is the branch of [linguistics](https://www.britannica.com/science/linguistics) concerned with the study of phonological, grammatical, and semantic changes, the reconstruction of earlier stages of languages, and the discovery and application of the methods by which genetic relationships among languages can be demonstrated. Give details.
2. (a) Give the nature and causes of change in the English language.

(b) How can we deal with historical gaps?

1. Primacy is accorded to synchronic linguistics; and diachronic linguistics is defined as the study of successive synchronic stages. Discuss the implications of the statements.
2. (a) Discuss the dialectics in historical linguistics.

(b) Under which four concepts do the dialectics operate?

1. Aristotle stresses that rhetoric is closely related to dialectic. He offers several formulas to describe this affinity between the two disciplines. How does he do this?
2. Explain ways of understanding dialectics such as viewing it as a method of thinking to overcome formal [dualism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dualism) and [monistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monism) [reductionism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reductionism).
3. Analyse the mystification which dialectics suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner.

***END***