Radical linguistics or "back to the basics": a few thoughts on the description of English

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The message of this talk is very simple and quite boring – namely that linguists should be much more careful about the terminology they are using. 100 years after de Saussure deplored the "utter inadequacy of current terminology" and pointed out the "need to reform it", we are still faced with the situation that many people who analyse or describe language seem to take it for granted that categories that were developed and are considered appropriate for one language (such as Latin) can be used equally well for the analysis and description of another language (such as English).

It is more than deplorable that 25 years after Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985) rejected the use of the term gerund for English, the term is still used not only in German school grammars, for instance, but also in academic research papers – often without there being any obvious consideration of whether this is justified or not. The same could be said with respect to the use of a term such as future tense in the description of English. And should we simply accept a term such as "dative alternation" as sloppy usage?

Such a state of affairs would be intolerable in science and is certainly unworthy of any academic discipline that wishes to be taken seriously. Based on the work connected with the *Valency Dictionary of English* (2004) and the Erlangen Valency Patternbank (2009) and an outline of the theoretical framework underlying these descriptions, it will be shown

- ▷ why **object** is perhaps not a very good term to use in a (valency) description of English
- ▷ why a distinction between **intransitive** and **transitive** verbs maybe is not as useful as it may seem
- ▷ why we should not necessarily believe that words such as *since* can occur as **prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs** in English etc.