

[John Lawler](#) is Professor Emeritus of [Linguistics](#) in the [University of Michigan](#) in Ann Arbor, where he was director of its [Undergraduate Linguistics program](#) (one of the largest in the USA) from the mid-1980s to 2001 (including 1991, 92, 93 – when he won three successive *Excellence in Education* teaching awards, and 1998 – when Linguistics won the first LS&A *Undergraduate Program Award*). He taught also in the [Residential College at Michigan](#). (He retired officially from UM on June 1, 2009, and now lives in Bellingham, WA.) He has also been visiting professor of English and Linguistics at Western Washington University.

After a B.A. in [Mathematics](#) and [German](#), an M.A. thesis on [Some Applications of Computers to Linguistic Field Methods](#), and several years of teaching [English as a Foreign Language](#), he received his Ph.D. in 1973 under [George Lakoff](#) and [Robin T. Lakoff](#). His [dissertation](#), [Studies in English Generics](#), founded the modern study of [the semantics of nominal reference to kinds](#), and of [nomic](#) and [habitual verb](#) reference.

He encountered the [Acehnese](#) language early in his career, and published [a number of influential papers](#) on the details of its grammatical relations, especially the construction misleadingly called ‘[Passive](#),’ which led to considerable activity in the theory of [Relational Grammar](#), and in [Austronesian](#) syntax. He also was dissertation director for [the first reference grammar of Acehnese by a native speaker](#).

In collaboration with [Richard Rhodes](#), he published in 1981 [the first serious study on the sound symbolism of English monosyllables](#). Rhodes and Lawler discovered that the [assonances](#) and [rimes](#) (in the word *sting* these are respectively *st-* and *-ing*) of English monosyllables show semantic coherence (e.g. *st-* is ‘[1-dimensional rigid](#)’, *-ing* is ‘directed force’) that in effect form a [classifier system](#), something unsuspected and unprecedented in English. He has followed this up with several [more studies](#) over the years, compiling in the process the [Lawler-Rhodes Simplex Word Database](#).

Since the 1980s he has turned his attention also to the study of metaphor, beginning with [the principal review](#) of Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By*, and including several [studies](#) of the [relations of metaphoric mappings](#). His online lecture [Metaphors We Compute By](#) has recently been included as a reading in a [Freshman Composition text](#); it is downloaded over 7000 times a year.

He is a software author ([A World of Words](#), [The Chomskybot](#)) and has been a consultant on computing organization and software development for industry and academia. In 1986 he travelled to Malaysia on a Fulbright Lecture/Research Fellowship, as principal linguistic consultant to Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka for the National Linguistic Database.

As Chair of the [Linguistic Society of America](#)’s Computing Committee in 1991, he organized the symposium and software exhibit that led to the book [Using Computers in Linguistics](#), edited jointly with [Helen Aristar Dry](#), Moderator of the [LINGUIST List](#). He wrote the [Introduction](#) and [Chapter 5](#), on [Unix](#). He is also a member of the LINGUIST List’s [Advisory Board](#), and of its [Ask-A-Linguist Panel of Experts](#).

A generalist by inclination, he has published on a broad spectrum of other linguistic topics, including second-language learning, [syntax](#), [lexical semantics](#), [negation](#), [logic](#) and [mathematics](#), [cognitive grammar](#), and [popular English usage](#); all of his publications are [available online](#). He is especially interested in the relations of [linguistic meanings](#) with [embodied human cognition](#) – as he is fond of telling his students, “[Ontology Recapitulates Physiology](#).” He has an extensive and varied [Web site](#), which generates around 750,000 requests a year and is widely linked and cited.

As a teacher, he is interested principally in undergraduate education (in which he has won several awards), and since his retirement, with making a permanent place for linguistics – especially [English grammar](#) – in the American primary and secondary curriculum.