

英语语言学概要

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* The Essential Points of Linguistics *
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PREFACE

This material "THE ESSENTIAL POINTS OF LINGUISTICS" brings together selected materials with which, I hope, the students of English may get a rough, if not brief, understanding of some rudimentary knowledge of general Linguistics. Such a purpose determines the way of compiling the teaching material. All the same, these selections must be slight and scrappy, and no doubt there must be faults or mistakes. I sincerely welcome criticisms from my colleagues and my students. The reference books concerned are as follows:

"How Language Works"---M.E. Heatherington

"General Linguistics (An Introductory Survey)"

---R.H.Robins

"Introduction to Linguistics" ---R. Wardhaugh

"Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics"

---John Lyons

"The Essentials of Linguistic Science"

---R.T. Nasar

"What Is Linguistics?" ---S.H. Egin

"Language and Linguistics (An Introduction)"

---John Lyons

"An Introduction to Language"

---Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman

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Chapter One

The Scope of the Subject

A. Linguistics as the study of language

Linguistics may be defined as the science of language. As with other branches of knowledge and scientific study, such a definition involves the subject in certain relations with other disciplines and sciences outside itself, and in subdivision into different branches of the subject comprised within it.

It must be realized that a subject like general linguistics, in common with most other subjects of systematic study, is not static. Viewpoints, including some of quite fundamental importance, may change or receive different degree of emphasis in the course of years.

General linguistics is concerned with human language as a universal and recognizable part of human behaviour and of the human faculties, perhaps one of the most essential to human life as we know it, and one of the most far-reaching of human capabilities in relation to the whole span of mankind's achievements.

That is why language in all its forms and manifestations, that is, all the languages of the world and all the different uses to which in the various various circumstances of mankind they are put, constitutes the field of general linguistics. Language is a part of culture. It is a part of human behaviour.

Language is an acquired habit of systematic vocal activity representing meanings coming from human experiences. One can also say, simply, that language is an acquired vocal system for communication of meanings. This statement tells us:

- (a) that language operates in a regular and systematic fashion,
- (b) that language is basically oral, and that the oral symbols represent meaning as they are related to real life situations and experiences, and
- (c) that language has a social function, and that without it society would probably not exist.

The course of linguistics will deal with the different parts of language. Language, as a system, operates in set patterns. These patterns exist on three closely related levels: phonology (including phonetics), vocabulary, and grammar. Besides, the things like what is the language, and the special features of language, are to be mentioned.

Phonology: The features of sound in a (one) language are systematically structured, they are divided into two main branches:

- (a) the branch of segmental features including consonants and vowels, and
- (b) the branch of supra-segmental features including stress, intonation, pause, juncture, and rhythm.

Vocabulary: The vocabulary of a language consists of the lexical forms (words) that refer to parts of our experience. In English, these words consist of consonants and vowels arranged in special sequence.

Grammar: Grammar consists of the means by which relationships between words are shown. These relationships also come from our experiences. The means by which relationships are shown includes inflection(cat, cats; like, liked; big, bigger), word order (He is here, here he is, Is he here), and grammatical words (shall, could, of, at, since, etc.)

Somantics; Semantics deals with the study of meaning, meaning of words, meaning of sentences and meaning of extralinguistic context. By extralinguistic context we mean that one and the same utterance might contain some other additional meanings according to a considerable knowledge of personal relations, social conventions, different tones as that of sarcasm, irony, flippancy, and idiomatic usage.

As a linguist, he seeks a scientific understanding of the place of language in human life, and of the ways in which it is organized to fulfil the needs it serves and the functions it performs.

It is an article of faith for the linguist that any language (estimated at 3,000 at least), no matter what the level of civilization is reached by its speakers, how many speakers make use of it, or what area of the world they occupy, is a valuable and worthy object of study, able to teach the linguist something more about language in general and the theoretical and practical considerations involved in the study of language. What is correct language? Strictly speaking, every Language is the

the correct language.

We have to notice that linguistics, or study of languages and the science of languages, embraces equally living languages, that is, languages still used today as means of communication, and dead languages, that is, languages like Ancient Greek or Old English (Anglo-Saxon) now no more spoken but known from written records (manuscripts, printed texts or inscriptions).

B. Descriptive, historical, and comparative linguistics

General linguistics includes a number of related subjects involved in the study of language as understood in the preceding paragraphs, and each may be considered both from the point of view of linguistic theory and from that of its actual operations or procedures. The most important and immediate subdivisions of the subject are descriptive linguistics, historical linguistics, and comparative linguistics.

Descriptive linguistics, as its title suggests, is concerned with the description and analysis of the way in which a language operates and is used by a given set of speakers at a given time. This time may be the present, and in the case of languages as yet unwritten or only recently given written form, the time may equally well be the past, where adequate written records are available, as in the case of the so-called dead languages like Ancient Greek and Latin, Old French or Old English.

What is more important is that the descriptive linguistics--descriptive study of a language, and of any part of a language, present or past, is concerned with that language at the period involved and not with what may have preceded it or may follow it.

Descriptive linguistics is often regarded as the major part of general linguistics. Be that as it may, it is certainly the fundamental aspect of the study of language, as it underlies and is presupposed by the other two subdivisions, historical linguistics and comparative linguistics.

Historical linguistics is the study of the developments in languages in the course of time, of the ways in which languages change from period to period, and of the causes and results of such changes, both outside the languages and within them. This sort of study, whether undertaken in general terms or concentrated on particular language area (e.g., the English language from Old English to the present day English), must properly be based on at least partial descriptions of two or more stages of the continuous language series being treated.

A linguistic phenomenon is said by F. de. Saussure to be synchronic when all the elements and factors that it brings into play belong to one and the same moment of one and the same language (That is, to a single language state). It is diachronic when it brings into play

elements and factors belonging to different states of development of a single language.

Comparative linguistics is mainly concerned with comparing, from one or more points of view, two or more different languages, and more, with the theory and techniques applicable to such comparisons.

Comparative linguistics is principally divided into comparison made with a view to inferring historical relationships among particular languages, and comparison based on resemblances of features between different languages without any historical considerations being involved.

Therefore, historical linguistics might, from one point of view, be regarded as a special case of comparative linguistics, for in historical linguistics the comparison is limited to languages which may be regarded as successive stages of the speech of a continuing speech community differing from one period to another as the result of the cumulative effects of gradual changes, for the most part imperceptible within a single generation.

In connection with the study of language, the term philology is in frequent use. In British usage, philology is generally equivalent to comparative philology, an older and still quite common term for what linguists technically refer to as comparative and historical linguistics.

EXERCISES:

- 1) What do you know about the scope of linguistics?
- 2) What are the main subdivisions of linguistics?

Chapter Two

The Origins of Language

Language use---speaking, reading, writing---is perhaps the most visible and distinctive of all human activities. It accompanies virtually every other form of conscious behaviour; we talk all the time, while we are doing the infinite number of other things. Indeed, many people believe that it may be our special use of language that sets us apart as a species from the other anthropoids who share part of our evolutionary background.

Although we have learned more in the last century that we ever knew about how language works, many aspects of its functioning still remain unclear. One of the more obscure features is the origin of language. Though the likeliest answer to the question of how language came into existence is that nobody really knows or is likely to find out, theories about language origin can be roughly categorized into two types; monogenetic and polygenetic.

A. Monogenetic Theories (Single-origin Theories)

Those who adhere to monogenetic theory hold that language originated from a single source, from which the many languages of the world then diverged. Divine inspiration or gift is the usual

source suggested. The Hebrew God, it is often supposed, spoke in Hebrew, as did Adam and Eve; the Egyptian God brought the Egyptian language to His peoples; the Chinese emperor, also descended from the Gods, gave the gift of the Chinese language to his peoples, and so on. As in the biblic story of Tower of Babel, when humans grow away from the gods or "the first speakers", they also lose their ability to converse directly with the gods; the multiplicity of language connected with a fall from grace. Nearly all cultures have language-origin myths of this sort, and in nearly all of the myths, the god who gives language to humankind is also a god of light. Origin myths imply so strong a connection in the human mind between language and light that we might be tempted to suggest something almost miraculous about language.

But one need not believe in a divine source of language to be a monogeneticist. Many theorists have speculated along these lines, such as in the imitation of nature's sounds, in play, in toolmaking, in art, or in hunting, and perfectly serious explanations have come about thereby, with names likely to make us smile. The "how-wow" theory, for instance, suggests that language is onomatopoetic, echoing the sounds of nature, such as a dog's bark, tiger's roaring, horse's hissing, etc. The "Yo-he-ho" theory, proposes that speech developed from the rhythmic grunts people make as they work at a shared and difficult task, such as rowing a ship. The

"pooch-po h " theory suggests that human beings developed language as an outgrowth of emotional cries, "Pooch!" representing the puff of air expelled when one makes a noise of disgust. The "ding-dong" theory proposes the imitation of natural thunder, breaking sounds by people.

These versions of the monogenetic position assert that we were stimulated by a single cause to develop language through imitating the world around us, but none of them accounts for the fact that the complexities of language transcend the original sounds or stimuli. Language use goes far beyond mere imitation.

B. Polygenetic Theory

On the other hand, polygenetic origin theories suggest that the sources of language are multiple rather than single, that no one cause produced language, but rather a combination of causes. Language began to develop possibly as long ago as half a million years, based on archaeological sources. Most people who stand for this point of view believe that such development began in several different places, among several different groups of human beings, perhaps at more or less the same time. They do not believe that only one group was given the gift of language, or that there was necessarily a single original language developed from a single cause.

Most commonly proposed as the multiple causes for language origin are several physiological

developments in the structure of human bodies. It is commonly recognized that our human forms have evolved from humanlike ancestral bodies to the human shape we know today. Chief among these developments is that of the brain, with the hand, the upright posture, and the vocalizing apparatus also playing significant roles.

The Brain, So much has been learned in just the past 50 years about the workings of human brain that although there is much yet to be discovered, we can confidently assert that without the present organization of the brain, there would be no language. Indeed, "language" can be regarded as separate from "speech" precisely because of the brain. Language is a body of knowledge, stored in the brain, about sounds, forms, structures, and ways to use them, whereas speech is the vocalizing (or gesturing) performance of that stored knowledge.

But if language lies in the brain, how did it get there, and what makes the brain specially suited for language?

We cannot answer these questions in precise detail, for we do not yet have enough exact information about how the brain evolved or how it works now. But we do have more sources of objective information than Plato or Darwin had. So we can be more educated in our speculation. Among those sources are anthropological data about the evolution of the human body, work with people who have language

disorders, neurophysical examinations of the brain itself, and use of much technique.

All of these sources have indicated that among its many other functions, the brain has become specialized for using language. We also know that the areas controlling perception of sounds and muscular control of speech are located in the left side of the cortex, because if the left side of the brain is damaged, language performance may be disrupted, as often happens to people who have suffered a blow of the head or a stroke. They 'lose' certain capacities of speech.

The Hand, Stance, and Sound. The brain, of course, is the control center for everything: speech, thought, feeling, action, survival.

The hand is important because it leads to tool making; upright posture is important because it leads to the development of hunting as a subsistence base; and as the hand and the posture changed, so did demand make on the brain, specially the demand for increasing sophisticated communication.

After a long period of evolution, the thumb got opposable to other four fingers. This opposable thumb made it possible to create and use more specialized tools, thus extending their chances for survival.

As a result of that move from trees to the ground, our ancestors were adapting to an upright gesture. When they stood up and walked on two legs rather than four, they acquired a number of survival advantages (run, see). Increased visual acuity and manual dexterity, meant more skill at making

tools. Upright posture also brought about changes in the physiology of the neck and head. When the head is held upright, the windpipe becomes more like a right angled tube with a long, straight stretch above the larynx, or vocal folds. This realignment of the 'pipe' increases the space available for resonance in the throat and accompanies the restructuring of jaws, palate, and tongue that now permits them to produce and shape language sounds.

Hunting requires a good eye, a steady hand, a fleet foot, and increasingly sophisticated communication between members of the hunting party, especially if they are out of each other's sight. The better communication, the better the hunters' chance of catching their prey, and therefore the better their chance of survival.

As to the sound, our ancestors must have found many benefits over gestures; sound can function both in darkness and in daylight; sound can accompany gesture; sound is faster than the quickest gesture language; sound can produce many more abstract meanings than a single gesture language can.

To sum up, language is a social phenomenon, a product of human society and can exist only in human society. Labour created human beings, and also created language. Outside society there is no language. Ideas and thoughts reflecting different aspects of human life find their way into the material reality of people through the medium of language. A constant close bond between the history of a people and the history of its language makes itself quite evident. Human

* origin is the language origin, they happened :
simultaneously.

EXERCISES:

- 1) As to the origin of language, what are the monogenetic theories?
- 2) What do you know of the polygenetic theories about the origin of language?