

Introduction

Language and Linguistics:

Language is the most effective means of communication that human beings possess. Human communication covers a wide range of content including ordinary conversations between individuals as well as philosophical discussions.

Modern students of language have so well defined their field that specialization has become necessary. Human communication is the usual scope of inquiry, and this excludes all types of communication that are not human. Animal “language”, or the ways of communication to be found among birds or insects and other animals are left out for the study of scholars interested in these types of non-human species as a whole. Non-human “voices”, whether they are audible to the human ear or fall short of stimulating the auditory nerves, are not languages in the present state of our linguistic knowledge.

Linguistics is a growing field of inquiry, but the study of language has always attracted the attention of scholars interested in social communication.

Three main streams of linguistic thought have contributed to our present-day knowledge about language:

1. The Indian tradition.
2. The Semitic school.
3. The Western contribution.

1. The Indian Tradition:

The Indian linguistic tradition grew around the sacred texts of the Brahmin religion. It was the task of a class of religious scholars to study these texts, to interpret them, and to indicate the proper way of reading or reciting them. This linguistic interest in the sacred texts extended to the actual spoken language of the upper - class and the rules for this language came to be called Sanskrit. The oldest Indian linguistic study that has come down to us is the grammar of Panini, about 300 BC. Western scholars became interested in the study of Sanskrit in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and ever since that time the Indian linguistic tradition has influenced Western studies of language.

2. The Semitic School:

Like Indian linguistics, Semitic studies of language centered at first round the Qur^{ān} in Arabic. A Hebrew grammar was also compiled by Jewish scholars in Muslim countries. Largely through Hebrew, this body of knowledge came to be known in Europe during the Renaissance. Some grammatical terms in some European languages are actually borrowed from Semitic; but none of the Semitic linguistic treatises came to exert a strong or a lasting influence on European scholarship. The names of such Arab linguists as Sībawayh, Ibn Mâlik, and Ibn Jinnî have been very little known in the west.

3. The Western Contribution:

In the words of one of the most influential Western linguists, "The Indian grammar presented to European eyes, for the first

time, a complete and accurate description of a language, based not upon theory but upon observation”⁽¹⁾.

In 1786 William Jones established the relationship between Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek; and the nineteenth century in Europe saw the first systematic comparisons of the Indo-European languages.

Three main streams of linguistics in the West have existed side by side ever since the beginning of the seventeenth century.

- (a) Historical Linguistics.
- (b) Descriptive Linguistics.
- (c) Theoretical Linguistics.

(a) The nineteenth century was largely a time of historical study. One of the significant achievements of this branch of linguistic studies has been the theory of linguistic change. The concept itself is a product of the Indo-European studies in the nineteenth century; and it was Hermann Paul’s book “Principles of Linguistic History” that dealt with it in an extensive manner. Although historical linguists neglected descriptive studies at first, comparative studies outside of the Indo-European family of languages began to attract the interest and effort of some of the founders of the historical method.

(b) Descriptive linguistics is considered nowadays as the basis for all the other forms of linguistic studies. Historical studies of language are based upon the comparison of two or more linguistic descriptions, but for the purposes of describing a

(1) L. Bloomfield, *Language*, 1933.

language, no knowledge of the history of that language is necessary.

With this trend of descriptive study there also grew an interest in theoretical expositions about language. Two of the main figures that have contributed to this wealth of theorizing are DE SAUSSURE in Europe and SAPIR in the United States. De Saussure's thought has been behind much of what has been written about language, especially in Europe. Sapir's influence on linguistic scholarship in the United States has been far reaching, but he is more within the European tradition than the trend of "American Linguistics" as a whole. In fact, Sapir has more in common with De Saussure's and Croce's philosophy than with Bloomfield and the "American" tradition.

The method upon which the Bloomfieldian linguistic tradition in the United States has been built is the inductive method and one of the most eminent representatives of this is De Saussure.

Bloomfield's book, "Language" (1933), has been a standard work as an introduction to the field of linguistics in the United States. He sees that there is no need for theories or generalizations about language until an adequate number of languages has been analyzed and described. Even after this huge undertaking has been completed, theories and generalizations about language have to be inductive. "The only useful generalizations about language are inductive generalizations"⁽¹⁾.

It is still common practice to divide the analysis and description of a language into three distinct levels:

(1) L. Bloomfield, Language, p. 20.

- 1- Phonology (dealing with the functional sounds of language).
- 2- Morphology (treating word formation).
- 3- Syntax (describing the sentence structure).

In historical linguistics, however, it is necessary to add to the discussion of these three different levels a special treatment of the vocabulary and how it had developed through the different periods of the history of the language. This division will be adopted in the following chapters dealing with the development of English from early times until the modern period.

1. Phonology:

The unit of analysing the sound system of a language is the phoneme. A phoneme is the smallest unit of the sound system of the spoken language. A phoneme does not have meaning; but a phonemic difference is significant to the language, because such a difference always indicates a difference in meaning between a pair of words in the language. The two words sun and fun, for example, have the same vowel and the same final consonant. But there is a difference between the first consonant in each of the two words. This sound difference indicates in English the difference in meaning between the two words. That is why this difference is significant to the language; and that is what we call a phonemic difference.

2. Morphology:

The second basic unit of linguistic analysis and description is the morpheme. A morpheme has meaning in English; for example, the word book is one morpheme, but the word books

has two morphemes because the suffix-s indicating the plural has a meaning distinct from that of book.

3. Syntax:

In syntax we are interested in the **immediate constituents**, called ICs for short, of the phrase or sentence. The basic unit here is the **Taxeme**. In English, for example, the taxeme of order makes it necessary that, in a declarative sentence, the subject comes before the verb.

“The boys ran” is an English sentence, where the subject “the boys” comes before the verb “ran”. But:

Run the boy.

Is not an English sentence, because the verb “run” comes before the subject “the boy”.

Writing Systems:

Two things have to be made clear at this point

1- The importance of writing.

2- Sound and spelling

1. The history of all languages has to be studied primarily through the writing system of each. In fact, the whole history of the human race would have been different - If it could ever exist - without the many writing systems in the world today. Old English, for example, would not have been studied today anywhere in the world with any degree of accuracy, had it not been for the written literature that has come down to us ever since the time of King Albert and after.

2. The spelling system of a language is usually a very rough approximation of the sound system of that language. The English system does not adequately represent the sounds of educated speech, whether in Britain or the United States. The letter a in the English system of spelling may represent the vowel [æ] in the sound system as in **man** [mæn], or the vowel [a] as in **father** [fɑð (r)], or still [ey] as in **game** [geym]. The situation is a bit different in Arabic, where we usually have a more adequate representation of the sounds of the language in the spelling system, especially in the case of school handbooks.

Some of the reasons for the disparities between the writing systems and the phonological structures of such languages as English may be due to the fact that spelling is more conservative than speech. Spelling also perpetuates this conservative trend when a literary dialect is established; and this literary dialect would again act as a strongly conservative element in the development of language.

The English writing system of today actually goes back to the fifteenth century, and has little changed since that time. But spoken English both in Britain and the United States has changed in many ways in the last four centuries. The attempts on the part of those who write “rite” [rayt] and “thru” [θruw] instead of the more conventional **right** and **through** are an indication of the discrepancies between sound and spelling in English. Such attempts may result in changes in the writing system of English in the future, but the conservative influences of spelling and the literary dialect make such changes seem

unlikely at present. If such changes in spelling take place, the student of the history of English will be in a less favoured position, since the traces of old pronunciations preserved in the writing system will disappear from the graphic repertory of the language after they have been lost to the sound system of Modern English.

Linguistic Change:

Language may be defined as a human system of audible sounds. It is a human institution because we know of no other creatures that use this same medium of communication. It is a system since the combination of sounds that make up a language form one unified whole structure in such a way that any sound combination is meaningful only within the framework of that language as a whole.

In the study of the history of a language we cannot depend only on the sounds of the language for its description. Written records are one of our main sources in studying a language, because the spoken form of the language can best be preserved for later generation when these sound symbols are represented, in turn by written symbols, usually called an alphabet.

The Greeks took the Phoenician system of writing and developed it into an alphabet. The Greek alphabet was an improvement over the Phoenician system of writing, as the Greeks used written symbols for vowels, which were not represented in previous forms of writings. From the Greeks, the alphabet spread to other Mediterranean countries as well as to other nations of Europe. It is the alphabet that has made the enjoyment of literature, past and present, possible.

Languages change in time. Linguistic change occurs in all aspects of language; in the pronunciation of the language as well as in the morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. It is the nature of speech production that makes linguistic change possible. No two persons speak in exactly the same manner, as the machinery for speech production in one individual is different in some ways, however minute, from any other. It is also a fact that no individual pronounces a single item or word twice exactly in the same way. If the “organs of speech” can be made to take exactly the same shape for producing one word twice, the time taken in the production of the item is not constant, however unimportant for understanding this time difference may be.

Linguistic change is a very slow process. It does not happen in the history of language that the speakers of a certain language stop pronouncing certain sounds today and start learning new sounds tomorrow. What happens is a gradual change occurring to various members of the speech community. This speech community, which includes all the members who speak one language understandable to them all, may witness some linguistic changes shared by the majority of its members. Other changes occur only on a limited scale and are shared by a few individuals only. Such minor linguistic changes do not usually have a lasting influence on the development of the language, and it is the first type of linguistic change that constitutes the subject matter of historical linguistics.

This type of linguistic change that occurs as a result of individual differences in the muscular movements of the “organs

of speech” is only one of the reasons why languages split up. But languages may split up for at least two other reasons; and it is to be noticed that these three factors causing linguistic change may work separately or together. The two other factors are the **geographical factor and borrowing.**

The Geographical factor: When seas, rivers or mountains separate one community from another, both of which originally spoke the same language, two distinct dialects of the same language begin to evolve. In time, these two dialects become two different languages. The Romans’ languages, for example, are a group of languages spoken in Romania, Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, and the whole of Central and South America. This group of languages were at one time only dialects of one language, Latin.

Geographical factors make themselves felt also in another way. When two communities originally speaking the same language come to be separated by some geographical barrier by emigration, for example, the language of each of these two communities begin to reflect influences from the new environment. This explains some of the differences between English in Britain and in the United States.

Borrowing: Linguistic borrowing takes place as a result of contact between different speech communities by migration or by conquest. Some of the sounds of one language may be borrowed by another language. The voiced labio-dental fricative [v] came into English from French centuries ago as a sound

occurring initially (at the beginning of words). Loans also occur in the vocabulary, and this may explain why such related words occur in Modern English: mind-intellect, explain-explicate, and kingly-royal-regal.

When two languages come in contact as a result of military conquest, the language of the conqueror is always the “upper” language, from which many words are usually borrowed into the “lower” language of the conquered. The language of the conquered may die out but, before it is extinct, some words will have been borrowed from this “lower” language into the “upper” language. This is the case with the words in American English from the languages of the conquered American Indians. It happens, however, that the language of the conquered may survive and the “upper” language die out. This was what happened to the French language of the upper class in England after the Norman Conquest.

In the historical description of a language, linguists have agreed that such a study may be conveniently divided into: phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. Phonology includes the study of sounds and their developments in the history of the language. In morphology, the words in their different forms are studied, while the study of phrases and sentences is taken up in syntax. The study of vocabulary is of special importance for the historical description of a language, since it is vocabulary that is readily borrowed and it reflects clearly the foreign influences on the language during its development.

Types of Linguistic Change:

Sound Change:

In the nineteenth century, European scholars were interested in the study of linguistic change and in making comparison between the historical change in different languages. Early in the century, the two European scholars, Rasmus Rask and Jacob Grimm, found out relationships between different Indo-European languages and explained these differences on the basis of linguistic change. They established that Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, and the Germanic languages are related. This judgment was built on the fact that in place of **p** or **t** in Latin the Germanic languages usually had **f** or **d** at the beginning of words with the same meanings:

English	Latin
Father	Pater
Few	pauci
Foot	pes
Two	duo
Tooth	dens

These and similar correspondences (regular relationships) came to be called **Grimm's Law**.

In 1876 Verner made a further study of these correspondences (sounds relationships). By the end of the nineteenth century, historical linguists began to speak of phonetic laws as laws which allow for no exceptions. It is clear that these laws are not laws but historical occurrences. There is a great difference

between a law of biology or physics and a sound change that occurs in the history of a language. The assumption that phonetic “laws” have no exceptions is actually “recognition of linguistic changes other than sound-change”⁽¹⁾.

Assimilation:

Assimilation is a sound change resulting from the influence of one sound on another neighbouring one. The position, or movement of one or more parts of the “organs of speech” in making a certain sound, changes to conform to the position or movement necessary for making the neighbouring sound. In **progressive assimilation** the later sound is altered. The sentence “open the door” is sometimes pronounced “opem the door”, where the consonant [n] has changed to [m] to be similar to [p]. Both [p] and [m] are bilabial sounds, although the first is a stop and the second a nasal.

Regressive assimilation involves the change of the prior sound. In this commoner type of assimilation the latter sound may be changed completely or only partly. The word **assimilation** itself contains a regressive assimilation, where the [d] of **ad** in the compound **ad + similation** (originally a Latin word) has changed to [s] under the influence of the [s] in **similation**. The word “**husband**” is another example of regressive assimilation. Its first part [hez] is related to the word house [haws], where the final consonant is the voiceless fricative [s]. In the word husband, however, the voiceless fricative [s] has become the voiced fricative [z] under the influence of a following [b].

(1) L.Bloomfield, *Language*, New York, 1933. P. 355.

Dissimilation:

Dissimilation is the replacement of one of two similar non-adjacent sounds by a different sound. The word **purple** in English, for example, was originally the Latin word **purpur**; but, since the Latin word has two [r] consonants, one of which has changed to [l] in English, the change of [r] has been called dissimilation. Another example is the English word “ignoble” instead of innoble.

Metathesis:

Metathesis is the exchange of the position of two sounds within a word. In old English there were two forms for the verb “ask”, and these two forms were **ascian and acsian**. In the two forms the consonant [s] occurs once before [k] and another time after it; and this interchange of [s] and [k] is called metathesis. This same phenomenon exists in the Arabic dialects which have (? ara: nib) and (? ana: rib) for “rabbits”.

These are only three types of sound change, and further types will be presented in the treatment of the history of English sounds.

Analogic Change:

Analogy or Analogic change is the principle by which the exception is dropped and the “regular” grammatical rule is generalized. Sound change occurs in the field of phonology; but analogic change occurs in the morphology and syntax of the language.

Linguists have not spoken of “analogic laws” in the same way that they have spoken of sound or “phonetic laws” because analogic change is not so persistent as phonetic change, and because the investigation of the principle of analogy has been made in the study of the internal development of individual languages, and not in the comparative study of many languages.

In English, for example, the plural form **cows** is a modern addition to the language, as this plural form appears neither in old English nor in Middle English. It is the result of the combination of the Old English noun **cu** [ku:] and the plural suffix - s [-z]. On the analogy of many other English nouns which take - s in the plural like dogs and boys, the noun cows has dropped the Old English plural suffix, and taken over the “regular” plural suffix - s ([-z] in this change).

The principle of analogy is again at work when new words enter the language. When the word astronaut first appeared in English, it was only to be expected of the native speakers of English to speak of astronauts in the plural on the analogy of other plural nouns in the language.

Semantic Change:

Semantic change is the change that occurs to the meanings of words. The five commoner types of semantic change are: narrowing, widening, metaphor, degeneration, and elevation.

a. Narrowing:

In narrowing or specialization, the meaning loses its wider application. The Old English word **mete** “meat”, for example

used to indicate food in general; but its use in Modern English has been narrowed down to mean “flesh good for eating”.

b. Widening:

In Middle English, the word *bride* used to mean “a small young bird”, but it is now used for any type of birds. Similarly, the word *cafeteria* in American English designates a restaurant where different kinds of food are sold. This is a widening or a generalization of the original meaning of the word in Spanish, which is simply a coffee shop.

c. Metaphor:

In metaphors, the meaning is hinted at or suggested by comparison or analogy. When we say “Words are silver, but silence is golden”, the two words silver and golden are used in a transferred or metaphorical meaning each.

d. Degeneration:

Degeneration or pejoration is the lowering of meaning or the adaptation of worse meanings. The word *fool*, which once meant a court jester, has come now to mean a stupid or reckless person. The word *villain* meant in Early Modern English a farm labourer, but it now means a criminal.

e. Elevation:

In elevation or amelioration the meanings are heightened. The word *angel* originally meant a messenger; but, as it is now used, it is applied to a noble heavenly messenger, the word “*fool*” meant in Hamlet (Act I. Sec. 5/1/1999) “foolish”, but now it means “affectionate”.