

Applied Linguistics
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Lecture 14

Application of Linguistic Structure in Social Theory

In this course we are trying to understand applications of the study of language in solving problems in real life that is the definition of applied linguistics in short. We started with this definition when we started the introduction of this course. Then we moved on to understanding language. We have looked at language, we have underlined the study of language, we have underlined why it is important to study language.

Then we moved on to understanding the relevance of language in society. The relevance of language in society is such that it is used in practically every domains of our life. We saw how it defines us and we saw how we cannot function much without language. So what we did, we looked at form and function of language, we looked at 'I' language and 'E' language, thus we made a distinction between 2 aspects of language.

One that is internal to humans and B, which is external to humans in the sense that the aspect of study about the use of language, this is the distinction that we made. We moved on further and we have looked at how human children acquire language from natural surroundings. How it is normal for humans to be speaking what is innate about language, we examine the role of universal grammar and how humans are wired to speak.

How humans are genetically programmed to speak and with that we looked at the acquisition process of language in order for us to understand language in greater details. Having looked at acquisition of language and the generative model which was proposed in 1957 around 1957 by famous linguist Noam Chomsky. We see that as a base for understanding generative apparatus.

This is one of the powerful models in understanding acquisition of language and understanding the underlying processes in language. Having explained that aspect, it is important for us to look at what constitutes language and what is it that we call underlying rules of language. In last several modules, we have seen structure of language at the level of sounds, words and sentences.

We have shown in the last several modules that studying the external aspects of language that is, what is observable and visible, namely the structure of language, it is easy and obvious for

us to look at the internal aspects, which are not so visible. Then we took examples from spoken language and examine what constitutes as underlying rules and what it is that generative apparatus picks up.

And we start speaking in the sense that we say we know the language. We also examine the meaning of “no” and knowledge of language in the process. Therefore, we have looked at all 3 aspects of language namely, structure of language at the level of sounds, structure of language at the level of words and such of language at the level of sentences. The idea of this exercise is to understand language in some details, language in totality.

And the idea is to understand how language looks like and what we mean when we say language is a governed system. Language is a system by itself and it is not a superfluous entity, it is not haphazard, it is not fuzzy. We have established this, now we are taking a turn and on the basis of what we have seen so far in this course, we are going to see how these understanding of language.

How the things that we have seen so far about language is going to help us apply these things in solving some problems. And we will start with the applications of this that is what we have seen in terms of the study of linguistic structure in the construction of social theory. We started with this and then we moved to second language acquisition, culture and others topics that we have promised you earlier in the course.

So let us begin with the idea understanding what is the role of linguistic structure that is, what is the role of the study of the structure of language in design of social theory. That is, in understanding social theory which is responsible for helping us understands how society functions in a slightly different way. This is also going to underline the role of the study of language in understanding society further.

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Objective

- We will take a look at the role of understanding of linguistic structure (underlying structure of language) in understanding, defining, and building social theory.



How social theorists, sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists have taken skills from understanding language and understanding things about language and how they have applied it in understanding their domains in greater details. We are going to take a quick look at this aspect of application of linguistic structure in understanding linguistic theory. So that that is what is the objective of today's talk.

That is to understand how underlying structure of language helps us define build social theory

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Linguistics Turns in Social Theory

- Awareness of the role of language in life was compared by social theorists as 'paint a picture without paints' or 'play a tune without notes'.



We want to talk about this too, and before that we need to build a base. There is a significance of the awareness of the study of language. We know about the role of language

in quite comfortable details for us to understand the significance of language in our lives. Several times it has been compared by social theorists that if we do not understand such a thing, then we are talking about some bizarre things like painting a picture without paint.

Or playing a tune without notes, so just to underline significance of language and significance of the application of linguistic terms in social theory. And we are going to see more that comes from other domains of study of society about the study of language. What sociologists, psychologists or anthropologist have to talk about the study of language in understanding society in a better way?

And this is one of the evidence of application of linguistic structure in understanding social theory. There are several consequences that happens when we talk about language.

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Consequences of Role of Language

- Self-awareness
- Communication
- Social Integration
- Decision making
- Language and Structure



The things that are related to language are and the things that it does are self-aware mess, communication, social integration, decision-making, language and structure. So we will focus on language and structure in particular and then we will see how it works. So again just contextualize it. So language has been of great interest to social theorists.

The study of language in particular the study of structure of language on surface and at a deeper level has both fascinated and impressed social theorists like anything. And we are going to be examining this and there is the substantial evidence available for us to believe how the study of structure of language has contributed in understanding social theory.

So they started with certain things like language is not random. Let us relate these things to what we have been discussing about language since quite a while. Language is not random; this has been established as one of the fundamental principles of the study of language. And this automatically catches attention of scholars from other disciplines when they look at language.

It is a social construct; this is another thing which attracts social loges and anthropologist in particular. The generative tradition of studying language may have certain annoyance with this kind of approach where a language can be defined as a socially constructed entity. This is not in opposition or contrast with the contribution of generative tradition, details of generative tradition deals with the 'I' language part of language.

When we talk about language being socially constructed entity, we are looking at 'E' language and a closer look at 'E' language that is the use of language does make us believe that there is a use role of society in constructing this entity called language. It is organized and systematic, nobody disputes that. And these are again extremely significant principles of language and are fascinating for any scholar to watch this closely.

It is so much systematic and organized that members of speech community of a language would need to know rules of language used. So speech community to understand these fundamental principles of language where it is systematic and organized and not random, we need to look at the contributions of in particular among structure is Ferdinand de Saussure and form generative tradition Noam Chomsky.

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Ferdinand de Saussure and Science of Signs

- Language is a system of signs.
- Signs are used to refer to objects in real world.
- For Saussure each sign has two parts:
 - Signified: Mental or cognitive image of the objects that we have in our minds.
 - Signifier: Combination of vocal sounds.



We are not trying to make comparison between Saussure and Chomsky, we are not trying to make a debate between their approaches to the study of language either, we are simply trying to talk about what is the meaning of systematic language and language being organized for different scholars in the tradition of studying structure of language.

So for Ferdinand de Saussure, language is a system of signs and he is known for talking about sign and then his contribution is recognized as sign of sign. So, what does he mean by science? For him, sign are used to refer to objects in real world, okay. And then for him each sign has 2 parts, only signified and the other is signifier. By signified, we mean the mental or cognitive image of the object that we have in mind.

For example, when we say “elephant” or when we say “a book” we have a cognitive mental image of this object in our mind. That image for Ferdinand de Saussure is signified. In other traditions namely generative tradition, this is simply an object. Signifier is combination of vocal sums that is a word which refers to that object. And these are the 2 different aspects of Ferdinand de Saussure’s study of science.

So signifier and signified are the 2 major parts of the study of sign. Now this is significant in the process of understanding underlying structure of language. Among the structural tradition, this was a significant contribution in understanding underlying structure of language.

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Structure, Language, and Social Theory

- Saussure believed that the systematic study of the structure of language was the fast track to understanding reality.
- Just as in language (system of signs), each individual element such as word or a sentence is insignificant and meaningless until it is seen in terms of the larger linguistic structure it is a part of, social theorists used this idea of part and whole in terms of structure in understanding social phenomenon.



So when we move beyond from Ferdinand de Saussure, what we see is it were established that the systematic study of the structure of language was on track and it was significant for people to establish the domain of linguistic in this tradition to put it simply.

In fact, Ferdinand de Saussure went to the extent and said so many things which make us believe that he seriously believed and rightly so, that the systematic study of structure of language was the fast track of understanding reality. Now, this is very powerful and strong statement. Understand reality, we need to look at structure of language.

All the way later, as recent as 1984, we find educational anthropologist like Sarl Heet underlying the significance of the study of language in the domain of linguistics in all domains of linguistics. And people like Heet explained that in greater details.

He believed that the knowledge that comes out of the study of structure of language in days ahead is going to be like general knowledge about the general principles of physics and biology or mathematics. We see resemblance of such aspects in the study of Ferdinand de Saussure. Michael Halliday believed the understanding of language that is, underlying structure of language is the genesis of learning itself.

And in greater details in a paper length work, he has explained what he meant by that. Therefore, it is not surprising to hear something like what we see here by Saussure that the study of the structure of language was a fast track to understanding reality. Now, so let us take this aspect, for Saussure it was system of science language was system of science.

And through the study of science, he established the system underlying and therefore he established that language is not a random entity. So just in language, each individual elements such as Word or a sentence is significant and is insignificant and meaningless until it is seen in terms of larger domestic structure it is part of. Social theories used this idea of part and whole in terms of structure in understanding social phenomena.


So, here it is in simple words. An object may not have any reference and a reference may be arbitrarily assigned to an object, but once it is done, it is done a very structured manner. And the sounds in a word has no significance, has got no meaning until it constitutes a word. So until it becomes the part of the larger word, it has got no meaning. Therefore, the parts are significant only when it makes a larger object.

This was another aspect of the study of structure and so this whole idea of the study of part and whole also got attention of social theorists in explaining social phenomena to certain extent.

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Structure and Structuralism

- Social theorists use the term structure explaining things like 'family structure' and 'class structure'
- For structuralist the term structure means investigating the nature of connection between part and whole.



So what social theorists did was use the term “structure” a lot. The examples are like “family structure” and “class structure”. So it was pretty clear that for anything which they realize has got certain pattern underlying, they use the term structure. As until now, there was no connection between language structure and the way they use the term structure. They were basically using it randomly.

So when structuralism comes in existence, and that point we see reference of linguistic structure. So for structuralist, the term structure has got some meaning. And the meaning was very simple; not very simple rather it was investigating the nature of connection between part and whole. So, structuralism is about the process is about understanding the process of a structure.

What constitutes a structure definitely is part of a process. So the tool to understand the process is called structuralism and this is where structuralism comes into existence. So once again let us look at its genesis in terms of the study of language.

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Structure, Competence and Performance

- Human mind is wired for language.
- Competence refers to innate capacity for the development of language and Performance refers to the actual use of it.
- The human capacity to learn more than one language shows existence of an underlying competence to use language.
- Each language is an example of generic human capacity to handle linguistic structure. Then, it is also possible that human mind can handle other kinds of structure for example in music and mathematics.



So keep in mind that structuralism is about understanding the process rather investigating the process of meeting structure. So, how is it logically argued? So, again let us look at certain fundamental principles that have come out of the study of language. These things are the contributions of study of language. So here are those simple principles, Human mind is wired for language.

That is to say, humans will definitely understand language, humans will definitely pick language, and humans will speak. Until 1957, this was not emphasized as much as it needed attention. Learning language was limited to imitation and stimulus response type of process alone. For the 1st time in 1957, emphasise was laid on the role of human mind in understanding language.

And what was paid attention to was again the study of input and output, there was no connection between the 2. Input was limited and fuzzy and chaotic in nature whereas, output was structured, organized and rule governed. When such an imbalance was observed, then input comes from immediate society and output is also delivered in the society.

So what was the missing link between the 2 and therefore, the role of human mind was underlined. And then in order to understand the role of human mind, Noam Chomsky talks about 2 terms namely; competence and performance. So again, competence refers to 'I' language that we have discussed. Competence refers to formal properties of language and performance is about 'E' language and the use of language.

So for him, so competence refers to innate capacity for the development of language and performance refers to the actual use of it. So let us let us move further, the human capacity to learn more than one language shows the existence of underlying competence to use language. Now it is quite normal and pretty observable in society that people speak more than one language.

The fact that people can speak and understand and know more than one language is an evidence for the existence of an underlying competence to use language. And that underlying competence is all about patterns, all about generative capacity of human mind in recognizing patterns. Each language therefore is an example of generic human capacity to handle linguistic structure.

So because of the principled structure of language, it is possible for humans to pick more than one language and use more than one language. So this was applied and this one applied in greater details to establish things in social theory in construction of social theory. So, here it takes turn and then we say, if that is so that is, if each language is an example of human capacity to handle patterns of linguistic structure.

Then it is also possible that human mind can handle other kinds of structures and patterns as well as in music and mathematics and it happens to be true. So, the fundamental capacity of human mind are human is attributed to recognition of patterns. Human language is product of human mind therefore, it is pattern governed in other words, which is also known as rule governed.

That is about language, but the fact that human mind deals with structures alone, which was possible by study of the structure of language, the outer surface of the structure of language has an object of enquiry, it was evident that human mind is also capable of dealing with other kinds of structures.

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- This shows that human mind is programmed for recognizing structured patterns for comprehension.
- An understanding of this system provides foundation for us to see or know what lies within by examining its effect on the surface.
- This has been a powerful contribution from the study of language not in Humanities and Social Sciences but also in natural sciences and developmental psychology.




It has established, this has contributed in establishing that human mind is program that for recognizing structures recognizing structural patterns for comprehension. If things are structured and patterned, then it is easy for comprehension. And understanding of this system provides foundation for us to see or know what lies within by examining effects of this on the surface. Let us look at this point very carefully.

An understanding of the capacity to recognize pattern structure by human mind provides us with foundation to see what lies within by examining its effects on surface. In simplest term, if we examine what we speak as an object of enquiry, it is easy for us to see what underlies it.

This idea, this has been a powerful contribution from the study of language not only in humanity and social sciences, but also in natural science, cognitive science and development psychology in particular.

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- The underlying principle here is that the nature of extremely important yet difficult to observe phenomenon such as intellectual and cognitive processes, emotion and human capacity for reason can be inferred and examined by looking at their effects on surface.
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- If deep structure determines what happens on surface, then applying the process in reverse should reveal the nature of the underlying process.




So the underlying principle here is that the nature of extremely important yet difficult to observe phenomena such as an intellectual and cognitive process, emotion and human capacity to reason can be examined by looking at their effects on surface. Now please look at the complexity in what we are discussing about cognitive processes such as emotion and human capacity for reasoning.

These things can be examined by looking at their effect on surface. And this is the contribution of the study of structure of language. If these structures determine what happens on the surface, then applying the process in reverse should reveal the nature of the underlying process itself.

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Claude Levi-Strauss

- Claude Levi-Strauss was influenced by the structure of language in particular structure of sounds.
- He applied this approach in his field work in understanding cultural patterns of the indigenous people of the Amazon region of South America.
- He found universal deep features underlying culture in forms of kinship terms, taboo, myths, and rituals.



And that establishes the role of structure that establishes what the role of a structure has done, what the study of the structure that images out of study of language has capacity to do. To take an example, we turn to the study of Levi Strauss, a very famous cultural anthropologist.

Levi Strauss was influenced by the structure of language in particular, the structure of sounds. And Levi Strauss has used his understanding of the structure of language in studying anthropology. He applied this approach in his field work in understanding cultural patterns of the indigenous people of Amazon regions of South America.

When he was doing his field work in Amazonian region to study cultural patterns of indigenous people, he came up with some of the interesting observations and he contributed that to his understanding of application of structure of language. He contributes it to the structure of language and then applies it to the study of anthropology.

And then he found these universal features underlying culture in forms kinship terms, taboos, myths and rituals. To take an example of taboo, he comes up with an example which is easy to understand that ancestor's sexual relations are prohibited across cultures it is a taboo. And this is not suspect to certain types, certain indigenous people rather; it is a taboo across cultures.

Now, what makes this particular taboo universal feature of culture? He contributes this to the fundamental existence of a structure and that he contributes to coming form, the study of the structure of language. So this is one example of the use of a structure, use of the fundamentals of the study of language in terms of a structure and its application in studying cultural patterns.

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Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan

- Freud developed a clinical analytical technique which operates on the principle that mental disorder that shows in the behavior of adults can be traced back to significant moments of personality development in early childhood.
- This reveals the understanding that the unconscious is structured like language.
- Lacan used the structuralism's idea of signifier and signified to explain Freudian Slip.



We look at one more examples that come from Freud's development of clinical analytical technique. So Sigmund Freud developed a clinical analytical technique, which operates on the principle that mental disorder that shows in the behavior of adults can be traced back to significant moments of personality development in early childhood. Now, this is a complex analytical technique that Sigmund Freud developed.

This reveals an understanding that the unconscious structure like language and Lacan used this idea of structure from the idea of signifier and signified to explain Freud's slip. So then he contributes that what we end up speaking reveals what is going on in mind and therefore, the notion of signifier and signified.

So, Lacan as a developmental psychologist has taken this idea from Sigmund Freud that the understanding of unconscious structure like language and applied it to greater details in explaining several abnormalities. Therefore, what we see is the role of the study of language in terms of study of structure has huge application in across the discipline and they have been applied by several social theories in understanding complex social phenomena.

And this has a huge differential establishes huge application of language from its various domains in understanding our lives in terms of our cultural patterns our speech patterns, our speech amenities all the way to a complex process of development and psychology where something at one point in time can be traced back to childhood. Thank you.