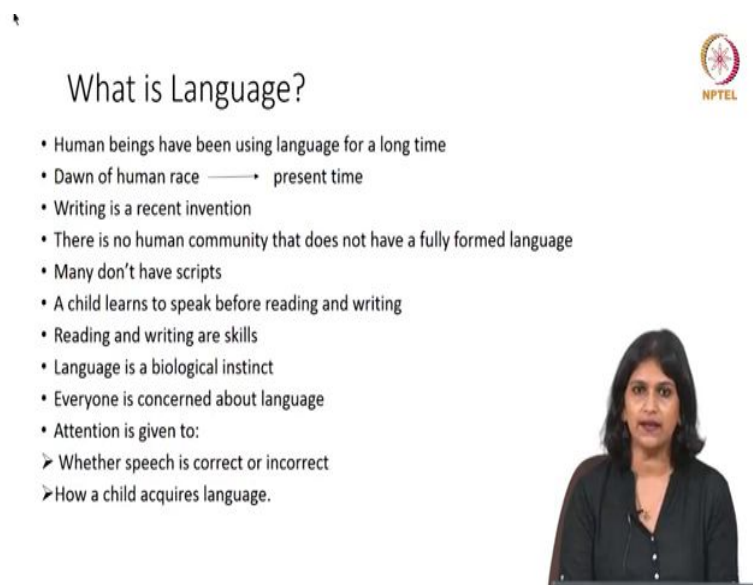


Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture - 01
Language, Linguistics and Linguist

Hi, welcome to my course, Appreciating Linguistics: a typological approach. I am Anindita Sahoo, your course instructor. I am a linguist and I teach various courses in linguistics at IIT, Madras. So, before going to the course description and what you should expect from the course, let me focus on the objective of this course. So, the primary objective of this course is to understand the fundamentals of linguistic issues, in a typological perspective, that includes various things of a language.

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The slide features the title "What is Language?" at the top left. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a star and the text "NPTEL" below it. Below the title is a list of bullet points:

- Human beings have been using language for a long time
- Dawn of human race —→ present time
- Writing is a recent invention
- There is no human community that does not have a fully formed language
- Many don't have scripts
- A child learns to speak before reading and writing
- Reading and writing are skills
- Language is a biological instinct
- Everyone is concerned about language
- Attention is given to:
 - Whether speech is correct or incorrect
 - How a child acquires language.

In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair, wearing a black top, speaking.

So, I will discuss typology as a term as the key content of this course in tomorrow's lecture, but today my focus is going to be on how to understand language. What do you understand when I say language? Can you tell me what is language? Generally, language studies is one of the most under-studied disciplines. This is because we take it for granted since everyone speaks a language and most of us are multilingual.

We speak many languages. There could be people around who speak three languages. Being an Indian, it is such a common thing. There are people who may know four, five or six languages at one go, and the first thing that you need to remember is that just by speaking many languages you cannot be a linguist. You would be called a polyglot. But then that does not really give you the authority to call yourself a linguist. Speaking a language and studying a language are two different issues altogether.

Now, let us have a look at some of the very basic or preliminary information about language. So, if you look around, who uses language in this world? We are human beings and we cohabit with other living beings. The planet earth does not just belong to the humans; there are many other species, there are plants and animals too. If you look around, could you tell me who actually uses language? You might say, my dog can understand what I say; when I give him instructions like go fetch a ball or eat food, sit down. So, these kind of words or phrases the dogs do understand, but that does not mean that the dog is actually speaking in any language. That is just a form of communication and we call it animal communication.

But here, for this course, our focus is going to be on language; and when I say language, I mentioned it in the very beginning, that it is going to be about language with a big L. So, big L refers to natural language; which is spoken by the humans and then there are multiple small ls. Small ls are the independent, the individual languages. Individual languages like English, English is a small l, Odia which is an Indo-Aryan language, is a small l, French is a small l, Italian is a small l or Icelandic is a small l. So, these are the individual languages that the community speakers speak to communicate with each other.

Can you tell me how old language as a phenomenon is? It is actually very old. It traces back to millions of years and human beings have been using it for a very long time. If you draw the trajectory from the dawn of the human race to the present time, you can actually claim that language has always been there for the humans and used by the humans.

However, though speaking has been there for a while, writing is kind of a recent invention. That is why the alphabet is not as old as the speech categories or the speech items. So, this is a recent invention, this is a recent process. And the other thing that I would like to highlight is that there is no human community that does not have a fully-formed language. So, if it is a

human community, they have a fully-formed language by now. So, all the human beings have a fully-formed language or they do use it as a tool of communication. Language does many more important works, but one of those important things is communication. However, do not be surprised to know that writing system is not as essential to humans or to languages, not really. A writing system is important, but not mandatory or not essential. There are many languages which do not have scripts. So, if you do not have the script, you do not have a writing system, you do not have a pattern, but that does not mean that your language is any less than any other language which has a script.

And if you think about how children acquire language? What is language acquisition as a process? You would, if you just look back and think about it; realize that a child learns reading and writing much later. Once you start going to school and are exposed to this whole world of books and notebooks, and then writing system, pen and pencil, but that happens pretty late. That happens at a later stage, at least when you were three years old, if not two, but language comes pretty early. So, as a child you first speak a language, then you move to the reading or the writing aspect of it and remember reading and writing are also skills, but they are more complex skills than speaking and listening.

Researchers like Steven Pinker would say, language is a biological instinct. So, what do you understand by biological instinct? It means that like other instinctive things like hunger, thirst, language is also a need, language is also an instinct. Can you ever stop a human child from acquiring a language; if the human child is healthy physically, she does not have any problem and she has all her speech organs intact and they are functioning well? So, you just cannot stop the child to acquire a language.


You might restrict his linguistic environment to some particular language, but the child must have to acquire it; if she does not have any physical impairment. So, that is the reason why we would say that language is actually a biological instinct. And as I have just mentioned everyone is concerned about language. Everyone takes language as granted, because we are so familiar with speaking, we are so familiar with using language effortlessly. We do not really pay any sincere attention to understand what actually goes on when we speak a language.

Considering it comes to us naturally, we undermine the importance of language in our life. And my contention is that, after you complete this course, you should be able to understand that what you see on the surface in language is not enough to understand what language as a system is. There are deeper things you need to keep in mind and that is going to help you appreciate this discipline called linguistics. So, there comes the title of this course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach.

So now, let us look at the last point that has been given here. So, through this course I am going to talk about linguistics as a discipline and here we generally pay attention to understand whether speech is correct or incorrect; how a child acquires language, these are two pertinent questions, when you discuss or when you deal with language as an instinct, or language as a phenomenon; for that matter language as a system.


When you say a particular person's speech is correct or incorrect, what is working there is called your intuition. Your intuition as a native speaker will help you understand whether a particular thing is correct or incorrect.

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Who work on Language?

- Many professions need some knowledge of language:
- 1. The speech correctionist – difficulties and impediments in language use
- 2. The teacher of English
- 3. The Foreign language teacher
- 4. The literary artist- language as a literary medium
- 5. The psychologist – differentiating humans from animals
- 6. The anthropologist- language and culture
- 7. The missionary
- 8. The historian- language and society
- 9. The philosopher – “logical syntax”
- 10. The communications engineer- transmits messages
- 11. Linguist



Now, with this very generic sort of information about language, let us move over to understand who actually works on language? There are different kinds of people, there are different professions that include language or the study of language, the discussions on

language and this is a huge list of all of them who deal with language. The first point if you look at it, it is written *the speech correctionist*.

The speech correctionists address the difficulties and impediments in language use. It could be in the written system or it could be in the spoken system, but they are the ones who are going to pinpoint where you are making a mistake; which particular usage is wrong, say, if there is a problem with the subject-verb agreement. So, these are the people who try to correct you, they try to modify your speech or they help you to be a better speaker.

Then, there is another group of *teachers who teach English* for that matter. They also deal with a language called English and here English is just a small l. It is not about English as l, it could be l1, l2, or l3 for people, but then, when you utter the individual word English, that emphasizes on the role or the usage of English in the day-to-day discourse.

So, the teacher of English would tell you what is a grammar system, how the rules of English have been there and if you want to be a good speaker what sort of expressions you must have in a given language for that matter in English. Whether a singular object should have singular subject, should have a singular verb, sometimes the plural subject will have the plural verb and then what should be the verb form, in what tense. So, all of these are the linguistics-specific terminologies that a teacher of English is going to tell you.

English is actually an interesting language. There are multiple reasons. First, it is the lingua franca or it is the linking language that the world uses. That is why, this is a language which brings a lot of privilege, a lot of prestige and social value. So, in such a context, when you consider English as a foreign language, the scenario changes.

When you are trying to learn English as a foreign language, the method of learning or the process of learning is a little different. There are three different ways: English as the first language, English as the second language and English as the foreign language. For example, many of the Indians, most of us have learnt English as the second language, because we have our first languages like Hindi Odia, Bangla, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil or Malayalam in an Indian context. That is going to be our first language, second language is English. Then there are people who speak English as the first language, that is the l1 and they are obviously the Britishers, the Americans, Canadians and the Australians. All of them speak it as their first

language. So, English is 11 for them. Then there are countries where English is taught as a foreign language, for that matter China or Japan or Korea. Their method of teaching is going to be different from our method of teaching, and we need to understand that in the due course of time.

Then the next category of people who deal with language are *the literary artists*. The literary artists produce literary works like poems, fiction, non-fiction and so on. All kinds of literary and creative things are being produced and language is used here as a literary medium. So, through their pieces of work, they use language and then they also contribute immensely to the growth of language.

Then there are *psychologists* who also deal with issues related to language and they would say human language is different from animal language instead of calling it animal language, they would rather put it in a more generic framework and they are going to say it's animal communication. People who have linguistic or language impairment, they go to *the speech therapist* or the psychologist. So, that is also an important area to discuss, when you try to approach language. Then, we have *anthropologists* and these anthropologists, they deal with issues related to language and culture primarily. The primary focus is on language and culture.

Then, there is this whole *missionary system* which has brought English to many non-English speaking countries, considering it is a language of religion because of the influence of Christianity in many countries in the world. So, especially in the non-English speaking countries, the missionaries use English language as a tool to spread awareness about things or to communicate with the mass.

Then, there are *historians* that we have with us. They study language and society from a historical perspective, and then we have *philosophers*, who try to study the logical syntax, so that is an interesting term. When you think about philosophy of language, you need to consider the term called 'logical syntax'. So, we will talk about it in detail in the next class.

Then, there are *communications engineer*. So, these communications engineers deal with discourse or they deal with language from the technology perspective and they generally try to transmit messages through different media.

Finally, we have linguists. So, what do the linguists do? All of the above mentioned also work on languages, but language is not the core point of their research, rather they use language or they deploy language, to understand the core areas or the core issues that their discipline deals with.

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Who is a Linguist?



- They are specialists
- They work on an organized body of information about language
- Work through investigation and analysis
- Relationship of a linguist and other language professionals:: pure chemistry and chemical engineering
- The more can be known about language the more
- we know about ourselves.



However, when we have a linguist with us, the end product of all for a linguist is going to be language itself. So, a linguist studies languages by using languages if I can say, and if you approach linguistics as a discipline and linguist as a researcher, I would say these are the specialists. These are the specialists of language. And you can begin it or you can start it from the natural language, which is the big L and then you can move to independent or the individual languages which are the small ls.

So, linguists are the specialists who study both language with a big L and languages with small l And what do they work on? They primarily work on an organized body of information about language. So, language for them is a system, it is an organized body and they have to

study various parts of it or the various domains of it and they also work through investigations and analysis.

So, investigation is the investigation of data and this data is empirical linguistic data. They try to analyze them and come up with the generalizations. If I draw an analogy, the relationship of a linguist with other language professionals is something like pure chemistry and chemical engineering. Pure chemistry is the base and then when you think about chemical engineering, you have to deploy the theories and principles from pure chemistry.

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Why is Linguistics difficult?



- It is not inherently difficult
- Troublesome for beginners:
 - New terminology
 - Difference between the attitude
 - Distinction between language and writing/literature
 - Distinction between language and script.
 - Correct and incorrect speech
 - Descriptive and prescriptive grammar
 - Difference between "Language' and 'languages"
 - Not being a language purist



So, the other language professionals that I have mentioned a while ago, be the psychologist or anthropologist or a language correctionist or a communications professional, all of them heavily borrow insights from linguists as professionals. And it is always more is merrier; more you know about language, better the research is going to be. So, a linguist primarily is a specialist who studies languages from a systematic or patterned perspective.

Now, we will see, why do you think linguistics is difficult? What is so difficult about it? I must tell you, it is not inherently difficult. Considering the course is appreciating, we have to appreciate this discipline. So, if we appreciate, we cannot really call it difficult in that sense. If something is difficult, it is a tough nut to crack. Then there is no beauty of it, because not

every difficult thing is beautiful or similarly, not every simple thing is beautiful, but inherently linguistics is not difficult, I must tell you that.

It might be a bit troublesome for beginners, because of various reasons, but if you can overcome the reasons that I have stated here, you will realize that it is actually just an attitude problem or it can be just a perception that has been built around this discipline. One thing that troubles you a lot is the new terminology. So, considering we have a lot of discipline-specific jargon which are deployed in linguistics, you might find it a bit tricky at times. Also, the attitude of learning, you need a different kind of attitude to master linguistics or to appreciate linguistics. You need to be more analytical. So, there is a bit of difference in the attitude, which is why some learners find linguistics a difficult discipline.

Also, a lot of us are not able to clearly differentiate between language in the spoken form and language through writing or literature form. We are not able to understand what are the inherent differences between these two. So is the case when we think about language and its script. There is a flawed understanding why and how script is important or not important for any given language. So, there has not been a clear idea that the learners have about this course.

And also, we focus a lot on the correct and incorrect speech, sometimes we feel a little shy when we speak in a different language and we always think that what happens if I do not speak correctly. So, these are the hesitations and shyness that we have with others.

Moreover, we also have something called descriptive and prescriptive grammar. This is also sometimes confusing, for a layperson or for that matter, a beginner in linguistics. When you say descriptive grammar, our focus is on the description of the language; we are studying. We are not language purists here. We do not restrict ourselves to a certain set of rules or a certain set of regulations that a language must follow.

We need to be more inclusive. We have to deal with such issues with an open outlook. So, when you encounter a particular language, your focus should be to identify what are its descriptive features. If the descriptive features can be analyzed or can be discussed then, that grammar is going to be more suitable than a prescriptive grammar.

So, what do you understand by prescriptive grammar? There are a set of rules which have already been laid out there and you cannot go against those rules. You cannot even look left and right when you deal with the rules of a language. If it has been given rule x leads to this sentence and rule y leads to this sentence; you just cannot alter anything. So, this is the purist approach of language. So, when you talk about the prescriptive grammar, you are primarily focusing on a set of rules that you have to follow.

Generally, as a linguist we try to refrain ourselves from being prescriptivists rather, we advocate the descriptive grammars or sometimes exploratory grammars, which I will talk about later. And my suggestion for you would be, once you get an idea about this course, you should not be a language purist, because I am going to talk about typology of languages, I am going to talk about the varieties that languages might have within the languages, across languages.

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What does a linguist study?



- Studies the structured of Language in a scientific manner.
- Levels of analysis:
 - Phonological
 - Morphological
 - Syntactic
 - Semantic
 - Pragmatic



There are so many other kinds of variants. So, in that sense when you understand what linguistics is all about as an independent discipline, you should not be a purist at all. So now, let us look at what does a linguist study. I have already mentioned a linguist studies languages with small l or language with big L in a scientific manner, and in this connection what are the different levels that a linguist analyzes.

A linguist analyzes phonological levels, which deal with the sound system. She also analyzes morphological levels, which deal with the word and the morpheme system. Further, it is about syntactic level, where we discuss the sentential level questions. Then we have semantics, which deals with the meaning aspect of language and finally, pragmatics, which deals with the usage of language in the discourse or the function of language in the discourse in its real sense. So, these are the primary or the major domains of language or linguistic studies.

So, when I am going to approach this course from a typological perspective, I am going to talk about all of these items independently. So, I will discuss phonological typology, morphological typology, syntactic typology, semantic typology and pragmatic typology. So, in the rest of the discussions we will start it with these subsections of typological studies. I will also give you an idea what are the extended things that are linguistics studies and we will discuss this in the next lecture.

Thank you.

Keywords: Natural language, typology of languages, language acquisition, native speaker's intuition, scientific manner, empirical linguistic data, organized system, descriptive grammar, generalizations.