**Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach**
**Dr. Anindita Sahoo Department of Humanities and**
**Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology,**
**Madras, Chennai**

**Lecture - 02 Introduction to**
**Language**

Good morning, I welcome you all to this session of my course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach. We have had two sessions before where I talked about what is language; what is language study or what is linguistics and then we also discussed what are the possible related things that the linguists talk about and who others are also interested in the research related to language and how the linguists are different from, let us say, a language teacher, an anthropologist or a psychologist or a communications specialist, who deal with linguistics or language research.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:57)

We have also discussed what are the reasons we should appreciate this discipline.

Appreciating linguistics has a couple of very solid reasons. So, the first thing is that it helps an individual truly to understand language as a dynamic system. All of us know that language is a dynamic system. It is ever-changing. It does not remain stagnant. It has its own changes that happen over the period of time and we must appreciate and we must recognize such changes that languages have or the human language or we can say as I have always been focusing natural language.

What it also does besides helping the learner understand the intricacies language as a system involves, it also enlightens or it also helps a speaker of a particular language to know more about his or her own language. So, when you speak a language merely as a speaker and when you are trying to understand it from a more scientific, technical or systematic point of view, your attitude towards your own language also changes. So, linguistics helps us in this way too.

Besides that, when you know what linguistics is and how it treats language as a system, you develop a kind of appreciation for other languages and not only the languages, but also its varieties. So, each language has its own multiple varieties and sometimes we get biased and try to emphasize on one particular variety and we consider it as standard and we look down upon the other ones, but that is not right. So, as a linguist, you are not supposed to do that. Never be a language purist; rather you should always acknowledge, recognize and appreciate the different varieties that the languages have. So, linguistics as an academic discipline also helps you develop to appreciation for other languages as well as its varieties and most importantly, it will help you get a comprehensive and scientific explanation for a certain language phenomena.

Just by saying that a particular language does not have plurals or let us consider languages

spoken in India, they do not behave exactly in a similar manner always, that is why we have typology; there are different types of languages spoken in Indian subcontinent.

Let us compare two languages: Hindi, which is one of the most widely spoken languages of our country. It is also our official language. It has a strong or robust gender system, which the rest of the Indian languages, do not have. For example, Odia, which is my native language, my first language; it does not have gender marking which is as robust as Hindi. So, when you try to explain why an Odia speaker fails to recognize or fails to speak Hindi and then sometimes you kind of laugh at a non-Hindi speaker or look down upon them. There is a linguistic reason behind it and we must know why a particular speaker of a language which does not have much of the gender marking actually makes mistake when she talks to a native English speaker. So, to give a comprehensive or scientific explanation of any given language phenomenon, linguistics as a discipline is going to help you.

Besides that, there is a lot more into it or the language itself is a complex system. Considering it is such a complex system, it leads you to understand one of the most important organs of the human body, that is the brain/mind. This discipline will also help you understand the human mind or human brain, how it works when you try to understand the cause and the implications or the issues related to language. So, a linguist indirectly can actually help you understand the human mind/brain. These are just a couple of reasons why you should appreciate linguistics as an academic discipline.

But besides that, there are more into it and gradually we will get to know more in the upcoming classes, but for the moment, I will focus on language typology and why the course has been named as Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach. So, when I say this is a typological approach, I must tell you why it is important to study linguistics following

typology and before that I will tell you what typology is.

The first thing that you must understand is, what does the word 'typology' mean? What is the root word here? The root word is definitely typology. I will lead you through that but before that, I would just give you an idea how I am going to link language types with this particular course and why I should focus more on types of language and how typology is going to contribute in a better way to understand linguistics as a discipline.
(Refer Slide Time: 07:05)

Let us begin with the understanding of linguistics from a typological approach. Up until now, we were primarily talking about the features of language as a system or what we must know when we are trying to understand linguistics as a discipline. So, I am sure by now you must have understood that study of language is important and if it is important, you must ask me the question why it is important. We did discuss a couple of reasons why it is important and I must ensure you that this is one of the most fundamental and defining features of human beings. So why is this one of the most fundamental features?

All of you know that language is the road to understand the human mind. That is the reason why a lot of scholars have been trying to capture its essentials from thousands of years. It has been a while. It is not a new phenomenon Maybe to study languages from a systemic point of view or from a scientific point of view or considering it as a system, it has been a little new in that sense, but then there have always been efforts to understand how languages work and what are the essentials of it which will help us understand the humans better. Because you remember I told you, human beings are the only species on the earth who use language and when I say language, I am talking about natural language.

Since we are the only species, by studying language in a systematic manner or by studying language in a more comprehensive manner, by understanding its essentials, it is going to help us understand human beings better. So, that is what a linguist does or that is what linguists in general do. So, what are they trying? They are trying to establish the limits and possibilities of human languages by comparing the structures of a wide range of varieties of languages. So, what is this? The idea here is that we are trying to establish the limits.

If you remember I just said language is a system since it is a system, it must have its own limits and possibilities. These limits and possibilities either they are random; one school of thought like one way you are going to consider it as it is a random thing and it does not follow any pattern or any sequence. It is so random that it is difficult for us to predict why a certain linguistic phenomenon behaves in a certain way. The other side of the story is that it definitely has its randomness. But this randomness can be predicted at times, if not fully, but partially and because it is a system, it has its own limits and it has its own possibilities, that is where we have something called possible languages and probable languages. There are languages which are considered to be possible and there are languages

which we might consider this probably could happen maybe in a few years.

So, what do the typologists do and why we should approach this course from a typological perspective? Primarily because of the reason that we are trying to understand the limits and possibilities of this language and what are the linguists doing? They are trying to compare the structure and this structure deals with a wide range of multiple languages of the world.

As of now we are aware about approximately 6,700 languages spoken by the humans on this planet. So, considering we have such a huge sample, we have some 6,700 languages spoken by it. We can surely segregate them into different patterns. We can surely put them in such a way that we can decide on the types. Let us say Germanic languages like English and Norwegian, they are going to be in a different category. Dravidian languages like Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam or Kannada, are going to belong to a different type and on the other hand, we have all these Sino-Tibetan languages, or the languages spoken in Japan, Korea or in China. They belong to a separate language type altogether. When I said type or typology, primarily I am trying to compare the structures of these languages.

One of the most popular or I can say the easiest way of language comparison is to study their word order. When I say word order, I am talking about the default form of a construction in this given language. So, we have units like subject, we have object and then we have verb. When we are talking about the subject, object, verb, that is not how all languages follow the pattern.

Let us say when I say 'I am drinking water' that could be *I* is the subject, *am drinking* is the verb and *water* is the object SVO pattern that is how the English speakers speak this language. But that does not work in Indian way. Most of the Indian languages would say it is

not SVO rather they are going to follow the subject and then the object and then the verb pattern. I will give you an example from Hindi.

So, in Hindi [FL] so, when you say [FL] that is the subject [FL], which is water, which is the object and [FL] that is entirely the predicate or you can call it verb and that is a complex verb. If you compare these two then you would see that these are so complex. So, I am drinking, with just an auxiliary and the main verb I am drinking has so many Hindi words here [FL] and then [FL]. So, two words over there correspond to three words over here.

So, [FL] is the copula here which is the auxiliary in that sense. So, this is going to be a little interesting. Imagine yourself as a linguist; let us a 1000 years ago. 1000 years ago, these SOV SVO this kind of study was not much popular or the researchers were not very interested to understand the structural differences in a scientific way or in a descriptive way rather the focus was on the prescriptive method of grammar studies and they would just give you English follows this pattern and obviously, when the other languages were considered, the patterns would be different.

So, to compare these patterns that the world's languages have, this would help us understand the complexity of the language in a much better way. That is what the typologists do. So, if the question is linguistic type, what is linguistic typology? Then you must know that the concern here is that for a typologist, who is also a linguist, she would basically do the comparison of the structures of a wide range of varieties of languages. There are two words important here. Wide range of varieties. You are not just focusing on different types of languages, you are also focusing on the different varieties within one language. So, one is a bigger set, the other one are the tiny sets within that. So, if I say Hindi, I have to talk about what are the different varieties of Hindi that I may consider and if I talk about Indian

languages or for that matter South-Asian languages, then I am going to figure out what are the South-Asian languages in which type can I add them in this category.

So, primarily, a linguist who is also a typologist is trying to work on multiple samples of world's languages and accordingly she would come up with some generalization and the generalization could be structural, it could be functional also. That is why we have two different kinds of typologists. We have structuralist typologists, who are working on the structure of language or we can call them generative typologist, you can also call them formal typologists, who are trying to understand the forms of language or the forms of human language following a typological approach. Then on the other hand, we have researchers or linguists who are working on the functional typology.

Functional typology would primarily compare the function of language or the function of multiple human languages which are used in the discourse. So, linguistic typology as a sub-discipline or as a subset of the bigger term called linguistics can include two different schools of thought.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:03)

Either the formal generative approach or the functional typological approach. The formal generative approach or what we call generative typology is comparatively younger than the functional typology because when you say FGT or Formal Generative Typology, the intention is to bridge the gap between the functionalist school of thought and the formalist school of thought.

So, these are the things we are going to discuss later towards maybe in the middle of the course before I give you the assignments and other stuff, but as of now, let us focus on what we expect or what we must know when we are talking about linguistic typology. So, to give you a formal definition about what linguistic typology is, just remember this is the systematic study and the comparison of language structures.

And as I have just mentioned it is not a very old discipline. It goes back to something like two and a half centuries. So, when the academic research and then the human knowledge has a long history, linguistic typology is not that old if you compare it with the other disciplines like literature or philosophy or sociology for that matter. It is just two and a half centuries old

and it started as I have just mentioned in the slides. It started as early as 1772 with Johann Gottfried Herder to Von Schlegel 1808 to Greenberg 1954. So, Greenbergian typology which is primarily the descriptive typology I would say. Greenberg falls in the category of the descriptive linguist. Greenberg's contribution to linguistic typology has been immense, though it has started as early as 1772 by Johann Gottfried Herder, which went on to Von Schlegel in 1808. But primarily for the modern approach to typological study, the credit goes to Greenberg and his seminal work on linguistic typology or language typology was done primarily in 1954.

So, by now, I hope you understand what I expect from my participants. They should have some basic understanding of linguistics as a discipline. So, with some very little linguistics background information and those who have not really worked on typology before, you are going to beneficial out of this course .

And when I expect you to know the basics of linguistics, I would like you to be aware about two primary factors for this course and then you must understand when I say typology, I expect you to know what are the genealogical affiliations of language and what are the areal affiliations of language.

When I say genealogical typology, we can draw the tree and then we can find out if this is Indo-Aryan language, Indo-European language or for that matter say Indo-Iranian language. There must be some kind of genealogical connection. Then there are other areal affiliations like let us say South-Asian languages. So, when I say South-Asian languages, here we may not have direct genealogical link with each other, but we surely have an areal affiliation among languages.

So, these are the issues I am going to I expect you to know before you come for the course. Even if you do not know about it; if you are a novice and then you do not have any linguistics

information before this, you can still go for some self-reading some very basic like generic linguistics books are going to be of help to you.