

Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture - 05
Linguistics as a discipline

Hello everyone, welcome to this session of our course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach. In the previous section I was talking about what is language and what does a linguistic study.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:39)

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



And then who are the other people who use language and why linguists are different from the other people who deal with languages. There are people who are speech correctionists, as shown on the slide. So, a speech correctionist also deals with language. It is not just a speech correctionist who deals with language, rather we have teachers of English who also study language giving more importance to grammar and structure.

Then, we have foreign language teachers who teach English. I gave you an idea about how English is taught in various institutes and schools as a foreign language in the far east countries like China, Japan and Korea. Then we also have literary artists who produce fiction,

and non-fiction in the prose form, poetry form and they consider language or they use language as a literary medium.

Further, we have psychologists, who are also studying languages; language and psychology interface. Anthropologists definitely focus a lot on language in their work. The missionaries too, where language can be used for religious purposes. Then we have historians who are trying to understand the relation between history, language and society from a historical perspective, that is called diachronic linguistics. We also have philosophers, who are trying to understand the correlation between language and syntax and language and philosophy. And there is a term called logical syntax, which we can put in this category.

Besides that, we also have communications engineer. So, what do they do? The engineers study how the message gets transmitted through a medium. So, all of them deal with language but then how is a linguist different from them? This was my question or this was my concern in the previous class.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:03)

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.



So, how a linguist is different from the rest of the people whom I have discussed a while ago? The first thing that we realize is that linguists are specialists of languages. That does not mean that they speak multiple languages, not necessarily. You being a linguist or I being a linguist, it is not necessary that I have to speak many languages, I am not a polyglot in that

sense. I study languages in a scientific manner. It is primarily what I deal with. When I am trying to study languages, I look for the systematicity of it.

So, definitely I study it following a systematic approach or a scientific approach. That is why the linguists focus on an organized body of information related to language and people like us, we also investigate it and analyse multiple languages like 11, 12, 13. So, there are various languages and we do analyse them. To give you some kind of analogy, I would say the relationship between a linguist and other language professional is similar to the relation between a chemistry researcher and people who are working in chemical engineering.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:23)

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



However, I would like to lead the discussion towards more linguistics specific issues and I would tell you why linguistics seems to be a difficult discipline or a little tricky discipline for many of the beginners. Those who have had at least some introductory courses in linguistics, must have found that this is initially a little troublesome for the beginners. Primarily for three reasons. First, the terminologies are very new and then there are a lot of discipline-specific jargon.

So, it becomes difficult for a beginner to remember and to use that in the academic discourse because of the new interaction with these discipline-specific jargon. Also the attitude plays a vital role. The moment we think or the moment we say or utter the word 'language', we do

not really take it in a serious manner because language happens to us and all of us speak languages in some way or the other, in some language or the other, which is why we take language for granted most of the time.

That is the reason such kind of an attitude actually prevents our research interest. We do not try to understand what is actually going on at the theory-underlying structure when we are talking. So, the surface word order is not sufficient to understand what linguistics is.

There is also a lot of confusion between writing aspect of language and spoken aspect of language, for that matter, language and script and a lot of people think that correct and incorrect speech is a big thing to discuss because there is a set pattern and you have to use the language in that way but that is not something we linguists do, rather we always advocate for a non-puritan view of language. So, do not be a language purist and try to understand what is the difference between language with the big L and languages with a small l.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:35)

What does a linguist study?



- Studies the structured of Language in a scientific manner.

- Levels of analysis:
 - Phonological
 - Morphological
 - Syntactic
 - Semantic
 - Pragmatic



Then after that I told you what does a linguist study. A linguist studies various levels and the analysis goes on many different levels like phonological level where we study sounds, morphological levels where we study morphemes and words, syntactic level deals with the sentence construction or the sentence structure. We also have semantics where we are trying to understand how meaning plays a vital role in the whole discipline called linguistics and

finally, pragmatics that is studied at a pragmatic level; that means, how language is being used in the discourse as a system, the real use of language in society.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:14)

Who does a linguist study?



- *Speech Community* : The whole set of people who communicate with each other directly or indirectly via a common language.
- Boundaries aren't distinct
- Sometimes the political boundaries coincide
- E.g. Menomoni language of the Menomoni traib in Wisconsin:
French, Italian, German and Ladin (Rhaeto-Romance) in Switzerland
- Speech Communities are fairly large
E.g. English: several hundred million speakers across the globe.
- They may also be very small
E.g. Tribal languages have only several hundred speakers- Chitimacha (American Indian language) only 2 speakers, Austro Asiatic communities in India.



So, with that, let us move over to the next slide who does a linguist study? We got to know what does a linguist study and then I as a linguist, I study languages and when I say languages, I am talking about l1, l2, l3, l4 and my study is systematic, it is more scientific and data-driven. It is also based on empirical evidence. When I say empirical evidence, I am primarily talking about the linguistic data that we collect.

Now the question arises. what do you mean by empirical data? Empirical data is primarily collected through the native speaker's intuition. When I say native speaker's intuition, here I am introducing a term called speech community. Let us say there is a speech community of Hindi or Tamil speech community or Telugu speech community; that means a particular community or a whole set of people who communicate with each other directly or indirectly via a common language.

So, if there are a group of students sitting here in my class and let us say it is a 40 membered classroom and then out of 40, some 7 people speak Telugu, then I would say this is the Telugu speaking community or the Telugu speech community. These 7 people, when they

talk to each other, when they try to communicate with each other, they use Telugu as the medium of communication.

So, that is the most basic definition of speech community. You can look at the slides, it is already written there. And remember when we are trying to understand the term called speech community, we must be aware that these speech boundaries are not as distinct as we think. There is a lot of fluidity. There is a lot of overlapping, language change and language contact; because of the contact in language, we do see a lot of overlapping between two different speech communities who share a common boundary and sometimes this boundary becomes a political boundary.

For example there is a community called Menominee, who speak Menominee language. So Menominee speech community is the language of the Menominee tribe who are primarily found in Wisconsin. But the Menominee tribe are also found in French speaking community or the French speech community, Italian speech community, German speech community and Latin speech community in Switzerland. So, when you think about Menominee as a language, the speech community is scattered or the speech community is distributed across different countries.

This is what I would say fairly large and I think the largest community would be English because there are several hundred millions of speakers across the globe. This is the lingua franca. We call it the linking language. So, English is a language which has a varied, huge and a good numbered speech community. Then we also have very small speech communities. If I give you an example from India as a linguistic area, then we have the tribal languages or the indigenous languages which have very few number of speakers.

So, a lot of languages spoken in Indian hills have tiny speech communities. Sometimes the number gets reduced to thousand. Let us say there is a language called Monsang, which is spoken in north-eastern states of India. There are barely thousand speakers left in this speech community. So, that is the reason we need to understand how large it is and how small it is when we are trying to talk about the sociolinguistic implications of such kind of study.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:26)

Language Families



- Typologically languages have been classified into broad categories.
- Indo-European
- Austronesian
- Niger-Congo
- Sino-Tibetan
- Atlantic- Congo
- Afro-Asiatic
- Pama-Nyungan
- Austro Asiatic
- Dravidian



Now let us move to the various language families that we have in the world. So, these are the broad categories that we know typologically: Indo-European languages, Austronesian languages, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, Atlantic-Congo, then we have Afro-Asiatic, Pama-Nyungan, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian. So, these are a few prominent language families found in the world.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:04)



This is a map that you can see. Look at all the blue coloured area or the blue shaded area. These are the languages which belong to the Indo-European language family, which has the

In the Indo-Iranian family, we have Indo-Aryan and these are primarily the Indic languages. And this entire side, the left side of this picture, you see all these Indic languages where they have the Iranian branch, north-western zone, northern zone, eastern zone, then east-central zone, southern zone and central zone. So, in the central zone, let us focus on India as a linguistic area. In the central zone we have languages like Bhil, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Urdu and Hindi, all of them are central zone Indic languages.

Then we have southern zone, where we have Deccan languages like Konkani, Goan and Marathi languages. So, that is going to be in the southern zone. East-central zone we have Bagheli, then Avadhi and Chhattisgarhi. There are many different languages that we have which you can actually see from this picture. Then we have Sylheti, Chittagong, Rangpuri and Assamese, these are going to be the Bengali-Assamese group. And then we have major languages like Sinhala, Odia and Bengali, Nepali Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashto, Kurdish Persian, all of them are going to be a part of the Indic languages which has its connection with the Indo-European family.

Then in the European languages, we have Celtic languages Albanian, Slavic, Baltic, Italic, Armenian, Hellenic and Germanic languages. Look at the picture. We have English out here, which is a Germanic language. We also have all these major languages which belong to Indo-European family: Spanish, Russian, Polish, Portuguese, Italian, French and German. These are the most popular or the most prominent languages which belong to the Indo-European group.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:56)

Appreciating Linguistics



- Linguistics helps an individual truly understand language as a dynamic system.
- Enlightens a speaker about he/her own language
- Develops appreciation for other languages and their varieties.
- Gives more comprehensive and scientific explanations to certain language phenomena
- Helps to develop and understanding of the complexity of the human mind/brain.



If you remember yesterday or in the previous lecture, I was talking about why should we title the course as Appreciating Linguistics. All this information that you have got about understanding language and language families and why language is important, this is the time for us to understand why you think linguistics as an academic discipline should be appreciated.

So, the first thing is that it helps us to understand language as a dynamic system. Otherwise in most of the cases, we consider it as just a mode of communication or a medium of communication, else it is considered to be a part of literature or literary studies. But language has more to it and linguistics actually gives us an idea that if you want to study language, you need to study the dynamicity of it and the dynamicity of this wonderful tool that we have in hand, can be studied well through this academic discipline called linguistics. When you study linguistics; you will actually get to know how your language is and how well you understand your own language. Only a discipline like linguistics is going to enable you to understand or to analyse language.

Also, a trained linguist always appreciates other languages and their varieties. If you are a linguist, a tiny bit of variation or tiny bit of difference at the word level, even at the phoneme level or the sentence level excites you a lot, you feel oh wow, there is a variation here and this variation should be studied carefully.

We generally appreciate languages and varieties. Why do we call something as a language and something as a dialect, is a different thing altogether, that is beyond the scope of this course, But then remember if you are a linguist, you kind of get excited when you see some variation or some difference. Even within a major language like English when you encounter, a country like US speaks it in a different way than a country like India. The English speakers speak in a different way or for that matter in Singapore or in Hongkong.

All these countries they have their typical ways of speaking English. So, these variations then are considered to be very interesting when you try to appreciate this as a language. Even the languages which have tiny speech communities, let us say the tribal languages in India. When you work on such languages, it also gives you an idea how beautifully the systematic study of language can be. So this is only done by a linguist. It is very unlikely any other academic discipline is going to approach it from this much of appreciation. So, that is why we must know how to appreciate this discipline which is called linguistics. Linguists also study this tool as a systematic phenomenon and obviously we are trying to understand the comprehensive and the scientific explanations behind almost all kinds of linguistic units that we see or that we use.

So, considering it is substantiated by the empirical data or the linguistic data, then we must appreciate the discipline for its systematicity, also for its descriptive nature. So, instead of being rule-governed all the time, we try to incorporate a lot of other variations which are found in the language. It also helps the person who is a trained linguist to develop and it also sort of helps us to understand the complexity of the human mind and brain.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:43)

Human life and language



- Language plays a great role, but often remains unobserved due to its familiarity.
- Taken for granted as we do breathing and talking
- Unfortunately language has no place in our educational programme or in speculations of our philosophers.
- Only in the last century language has been studied in a scientific way by careful and comprehensive observation.
- Linguistics, the scientific study of language is only at its beginning.



That is the scope of linguistics that we have to understand; the relation between human mind/brain and language. A linguist appreciates it in the best possible ways. That is why this discipline is truly interdisciplinary. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this discipline, we must appreciate and then let us find out since I ended the last point with the human mind and human brain, I am not really going to talk about it from the cognition and neuroscience perspective.

But then I am just going to give you some extra information about how language is associated with human life. And once you get to know how it is associated, you will appreciate this discipline even more. So, all of us know that we have already had some discussions on this that language plays a great role, but why does it remain unobserved? What do you think? It remains unobserved because of its familiarity. All of us speak some language or the other, and since we speak languages and some of us are multilingual, we speak many languages at a time.

And that sort of undermines the potential that language as a tool has. Studying it carefully can actually open up many doors to understand the human behaviour and human cognition. It can also give you an idea how to trace the human movements. So, language can actually do multiple things. And since it comes to us naturally and we tend to take it in a very casual manner, and something like that we breathe and we talk. So, that is the reason why language remains an area which needs to be probed further in different ways.

And the saddest thing is that it does not really have a firm position that it deserves in our educational programme or for that matter in the speculations of our philosophers. There are very few philosophers who actually talk about language or they try to study language from a philosophical perspective. Otherwise if you look at it from the day-to-day discourse, our educational discourse, you see that hardly has there been any effort paid to put language in our educational programmes.

But the good thing is that though it is pretty late, it is something like better late than never. So, in the last century, language has been studied in a scientific way, by careful and comprehensive observation. So, linguists are making a sincere effort to understand how it can be studied in a careful manner and we are actually paying much attention to the comprehensive observation that it might offer us. And linguistics, as I mentioned, we must appreciate it considering it is a scientific and systematic study of language. This is just the beginning. It has got to go a long way.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:13)

Human life and language



- Linguistics is different from traditional grammar studies.
- The Greeks had a gift of wondering at things that other people take for granted.
- They speculated boldly and persistently about history, origin and development of language.
- Ancient Greeks studies no language but their own.
- Greek structure was considered the universal forms of human thought.
- Greek was studied thoroughly.



It is going to go a long way because people who are studying linguistics, even those who are not studying linguistics formally, they are appreciating this discipline. So, we must know what is the potential that this discipline has and what kind of possibilities we as linguists and language enthusiasts for that matter, can bring into this discipline. You must know there is a bit of history that I want to put before you, before I really move to the typological aspect of it.

This is different from traditional grammar studies. We will see how it is different a little later, but then let me just give you a brief idea related to the history of language. We will stop here for a while and then I will come back to you in a minute.

Keywords: Scientific and systematic study of language, native speaker's intuition, speech community, language family, dynamicity of language, language and its varieties, inclusiveness of language, interdisciplinarity of language, language and cognition.