

Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture - 06
History of Linguistics

(Refer Slide Time: 00:17)

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 studied no language but their own.
- Greek structure was considered the universal forms of human thought.
- Greek was studied thoroughly.



Let us continue the discussion on human life and language again. Before this, I just mentioned how we should appreciate linguistics as a discipline and now let us see how its history has been discussed in the literature. The Greeks are the ones who should be given a lot of credit for putting language at the forefront as far as academic research is concerned or the grammar is concerned.

Initially it started as a traditional grammar studies and the Greeks were the pioneers in this field. The Greeks had this gift of wondering at things that other people would take for granted. Let us say a non-Greek person would not pay too much attention to language. It happens to us naturally and hence we do not really think much about it. But the Greek had this inherent inquisitive attitude which actually helped them to contribute a lot to the human learning.

They were wondering at things like why language has been like that and a good thing that they did so firmly is that they speculated persistently and boldly about history, origin and development of language. No other civilization or no other community was that strong or that bold enough to talk about the history, origin and development of language. It is the Greeks who actually should get the credit.

However, there was a tiny limitation, and this tiny limitation was ancient Greeks studied, but they studied only their language. They did not study anything else because the communication system was not as wide as you see nowadays. It was the good old time in a sense, but then considering they did not have access to any of the languages at that particular time, the Greek scholars studied their own language. As a result, the structure of Greek was considered to be the universal form of human thought, which is not right, the universe was not limited to the Greeks only.

However, since the scholars studied their language, there was an assumption that all the human languages or all the human thoughts are kind of concentrated on how the Greeks think or how the Greeks interpret. So that is a drawback or a limitation that Greeks had, but the good thing is that they studied language in the most thorough manner.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:09)

Human life and language



- Greek generalizations about language were not improved upon until 18th century.
- Scholars ceased to view as a direct gift of God, rather put forth various theories as to its origin.
- For the medieval scholar, language means Classical Latin as it appeared in books.
- Renaissance.... Middle age.... Revival of Greek learning.. Hebrew and Arabic added
- Era of exploration brought superficial knowledge of many languages



Until the 18th century, the great generalizations about language could not be improved upon because there was hardly any language research or linguistics research or there was hardly any interest or inquisitiveness about language. I have to reiterate it all the time. Considering language is so common to us; it happens to all of us; all of us use some language or the other, so we tend to take it for granted.

All these Greek generalizations could not be worked on or they could not be improved until the 18th century. However, eventually the scholars started working more on it and they seized to view language as a direct gift of God. It has not come to us from God. That is not the scientific way of thinking about it, rather there are multiple theories which deal with the origin of it for that matter. And during the medieval period, whenever you talk about any language, primarily classical Latin was there at the forefront because it appeared in the books.

Latin was one of the most powerful languages. Then Renaissance took place, then there was the middle age, then there was the revival of Greek learning. Hebrew and Arabic also got added. So, these are the classical languages, these are the oldest languages which have given us a lot of information about language structure. Whatever contribution we see in linguistics now, a major chunk of its credit actually goes to the Greek scholars, Hebrew scholars and the Arabic scholars, who studied their own languages extensively and thoroughly, that actually helped the new generation researchers to take language in a more serious way.

However, the drawback or the limitation is that such kind of an exploration actually brought superficial knowledge of many languages. People did not really go into much detail. The study of language remained at a very superficial level.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:19)

Human life and language



- Travelers brought vocabularies, missionaries translated religious books into local languages
- Some compiled grammars and dictionaries of exotic languages.
- Spanish priests began it in early sixteenth century for many American and Philippine languages.
- Increase of commerce and trade led to compilation of grammars and dictionaries.
- Renaissance turned the interest of scholars to the older records of their own languages.



Now let us look at it how the languages came into contact with each other, how they influenced each other and how the world came to know about each other's language. Primarily the travellers should be given the credit. They brought the vocabularies. From one place to the other or from one continent to the other, the travellers are the ones who helped languages to grow, who helped languages to get new vocabulary.

A major role that missionaries played in the 18th century, they translated religious books into local languages. That is one of the finest things that they could do for bringing recognition to the local languages. Their intention was different. Their intention was related to religion, but in the process a lot of local languages could get a lot of attention. And some of the missionaries also started compiling grammars of the local languages, they started writing dictionaries of exotic indigenous languages.

That is one of the most wonderful things that the missionaries did, to bring recognition to the local or to the indigenous languages for that matter. And in this connection I would actually like to highlight the contribution of the Spanish priests. It started in the early 16th century for many American and Philippino languages. Considering the priests from Spain translated the sacred texts into the local American languages and Philippine languages, they also wrote

grammars, they also wrote dictionaries. So, that helped a lot of Philippine languages to get recognition at the world front.

Then the travellers also did their share of work. They contributed in their own way. The increase of commerce and trade actually led to the compilation of grammars and dictionaries. With the grammars and dictionaries, more languages were identified or more languages came into the knowledge of the people.

So, the travellers contributed a lot to it and as a result, there was a lot of compilation of grammar as well as dictionaries. And something that contributed immensely to this process is renaissance. Because of renaissance, a lot of scholars showed interest and they tried to document or they tried to study the older records of their own language, the literary evidence that they had or the literary texts that they had, they actually started studying them.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:19)

European Languages



- Germanic Group (English, Dutch, German, Danish, Swedish)
- Romance Group (French, Italian, Spanish)
- Slavic Group (Russian, Polish, Bohemian, Serbian)
- These groups are formed due to the close morphological resemblance.
- In India arose a body of knowledge which brought a revolution in European ideas about linguistic analysis.
- Vedas contributed immensely to the field of language study.



So, that is all about the history of linguistics, a very brief history. There is more into it, it is just a symbolic thing that I discussed to acknowledge the contribution of Europe or to acknowledge the contribution of the west to this discipline called linguistics. And I will move to the Indian languages or India as a linguistic area a little later, but for the moment, let us see what are the different language groups that we have.

You remember I showed you that picture. So, here is a snapshot of that. So, I have kind of written 3 major languages that belong to European language family. We have Germanic group which includes languages like English, Dutch, German, Danish and Swedish. Then we have Romance group which has French, Italian and Spanish. Then we have Slavic group which has Russian, Polish, Bohemian and Serbian languages. Now the question arises why English, German and Dutch are put in the Germanic category, French and Spanish are in the Romance category and Russian and Polish in the Slavic category?

So, what is the reason, why have these languages been put together? This is the aim of any linguistics course that approaches it from a typological perspective. So, what is the Germanic type, what is the Romance type and what is the Slavic type? At the very beginning I will tell you these groups are formed due to the close morphological resemblance that they have. So, the words have similar structures or similar forms or similar pronunciation sometimes, so they do host similar sounds.

Because of the close morphological resemblance that they have, these languages have been put together in one category and I just said Europe contributed a lot or the west contributed a lot to the study of linguistics. However, in the oriental part of the world, in the Eastern world, we had India and India arose a body of knowledge which actually brought a huge revolution in European ideas about linguistic analysis. We had this ancient literary text, the Vedas, which were written in Sanskrit. They contributed immensely to the field of language study.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:57)

Greek Tradition



- Protagoras- Credited with the distinction of three genders
- Plato (429-347B.C.)- Distinguished between nouns and verbs (definitions are different though)
- Nouns: Terms that could function in sentences as the subjects of predication
- Verbs: Terms which could express the action or quality predicated
- Notes:
 1. The definition of two major grammatical categories was made on logical sense.
 2. Verbs and adjectives are put together



So, that is how the Indic tradition evolved. We have Panini, who is considered to be the founder of modern linguistic studies, and his Sanskrit text, his Sanskrit grammar is known as Ashtadhyayi I will talk about it later, maybe. That helps us to find out a lot of things about Indic languages in particular and languages in general; the big L and the small l. The European scholars took it up from Panini's contribution in Sanskrit and if you look at the Greek tradition, here is some information, you can simply have a look at it.

Protagoras was credited with the distinction of 3 genders in English, Plato distinguished between the nouns and verbs, also the definitions are different. So, when Plato defines nouns and verbs, his definitions are going to be different from the general understanding or the common understanding of nouns and verbs. So, for Plato, nouns are the terms that could function in sentences as the subjects of predication, but not all nouns can be or should be treated as subjects of predication. There are also non-subject predications which can also be nouns, similar is the case with verbs.

So, for Plato, verbs are the terms which express the action or quality is predicated over there. Generally the verbs express action, but not all verbs actually express action. We have the non-action verbs; there are the verbs like copula or the verbs like the auxiliary verbs or the helping verbs: will, shall, is, I, am, are. These are not really the action-centric verbs. There

are verbs which talk about emotions. Those are not the verbs always talked about or always related to action.

Plato's definition got changed later, but if you think about the contemporary society at that point of time, this was one of the biggest achievements that the philosophers had if you consider language as a systematic study..

And please note these are two different things. These two independent grammatical categories like noun and verb, they were considered, they were made on logical sense and eventually the newer grammatical categories were added and adjectives are one of them. So, to begin with, nouns were introduced, then the verbs were introduced and finally we got the adjectives and now we have 5 other parts of speech which are part of this grammar.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:27)

Greek Tradition



- Aristotle (384-322 B.C):
 1. Added conjunctions (Words which do not belong to nouns and verbs)
 2. Categorized tense
- Stoic philosophers gave the most attention to language through logic.
- Distinguished between active and passive voice; transitive and intransitive predicates; recognized articles.
- Alexandrian scholars, followed by Stoics, added categories like adverbs, participles, pronouns and prepositions
- **Dyonisus Thrax first published the comprehensive and systematic grammatical description in the Western World.**



And these are just a few things about the Greek tradition I am going to talk about. I did discuss about Protagoras and Plato, then we have Aristotle whose contribution is that he added conjunctions. I told you from nouns, to verbs, to objectives, then we added conjunctions. So, Aristotle actually identified a separate category which is available in human language and that would be the added conjunction. He actually added the conjunctions in the list of linguistic items.

Aristotle also categorized tense. Tense as a system in any human language was predicted or was compiled in the language system primarily by Aristotle. So now, how many different kinds of linguistic items have we got? We got nouns, we got verbs, we got adjectives, conjunctions and also tense got introduced as a linguistic item.

Then we had the Stoic philosophers who gave most attention to language through logic. Instead of identifying the independent let us say categories in language studies, they focused on the philosophy of language. And then we had the Alexandrian scholars followed by the Stoics, they added categories like adverbs, participles, pronouns and prepositions.

The entire study of language took a systematic shape and please note what is shown in the slide, it is mentioned in red color. It is Dionysius Thrax, that is the first published comprehensive and systematic grammatical description of the western world. So, that is the first thing which actually talked about all these kinds of parts of speech and it is a most compiled version. So, this was all about the Greek tradition which influenced a lot to the study of language or linguistics as a discipline.

Now we will move to the Indic traditions. In the Indic tradition, you have what I was talking about, Greek plus Roman so, we would say Greco - Roman tradition.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:41)

Indic Tradition



- Independent of Greco-Roman tradition
- Panini (4th century B.C.?) was the chief architect of Indic linguistic tradition
- Similarity with Greek tradition : Recognized more parts of speeches like prepositions and particles
- Superiority: Study of sounds; study of internal structure of words
- Indian classification of sounds are more detailed
- Discovery of Sanskrit by western scholars primarily helped in the development of comparative philology.



However the Indic tradition was very unique. It was different from the Greco - Roman traditions; not only different, it is also independent. So, as I mentioned a while ago, I would focus more on Panini here. It is assumed that Panini was there in 4th century BC though there is a little controversy around it, but then let us consider it as it is and he was the chief architect of Indic linguistic tradition. Not only to Indic linguistics but Panini has a lot to contribute to the entire linguistic tradition if you think about it.

Just like the Greek tradition, Panini also recognized more parts of speeches like prepositions and particles. This discovery brought new dimensions to the linguistic study. It is Panini who actually gave us an idea that sounds in a language should also be studied carefully. We should not just focus on the words or morphemes or sentences, rather sounds must acquire a relevant position to be studied carefully because the internal structure of the words got decided by the study of sound.

So, that is a reason why we keep Panini at a superior position than the Greco- Roman scholars and however, I must tell you that this study which was done in the early let us say 4th century BC caught attention of the world only by the Western scholars. So, this discovery of Sanskrit grammar was brought into the foreground by the Western scholars.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:19)

Indic tradition



- Indic (primarily Hindu) grammarians extended their interest from the scriptures to upper-caste language (Sanskrit)
- Descriptive rules are formed, part of speech studied
- Systematic arrangement of grammar and lexicon
- Timeline: 350-250 B.C. (Greatest monuments of human intelligence)
- Knowledge of Sanskrit reached Europe through missionaries in 16th and 17th Century.
- Sir William Jones (1746-1794) stated that Sanskrit, Latin and Greek are contemporary languages and have sprung from some common source which no longer exists.



And that paved the way to the study of Indic tradition or to the study of comparative philology. When I say comparative philology, I am primarily going to talk about how to compare the Greek tradition and the Indic tradition. We just had an idea about how Greco-Roman works for linguistics as a discipline.

Now, let us look at how the Indic tradition works and what is the contribution of Indic tradition in studying language in a systematic and scientific manner. When I say Indic tradition, it is primarily the Hindu tradition, where the grammarians extended their interest from the scriptures to Sanskrit, which is considered to be an upper caste language, because it is only the Brahmins who had this privilege to use this language in the day-to-day discourse.

So, what is the next contribution of the Indic tradition? The scholars who were working on the grammar of Sanskrit tried to frame the descriptive rules and they identified the independent and individual parts of speeches and they were studied more carefully than ever before and this is the timeline as shown on the slide, 350 to 250 BC, and this is considered to be hosting greatest monuments of human intelligence.

So, a lot of wonderful contribution took place which actually enriched human learning and human knowledge and as I have just mentioned a while ago, knowledge of Sanskrit reached Europe through missionaries in the 16th and 17th century. And one of the most noted linguists who should get a lot of credit is Sir William Jones. He stated that Sanskrit, Latin and Greek are contemporary languages and this claim was one of the tallest claims of the contemporary time.

He also made another very bold statement and his claim was that all the 3 languages Sanskrit, Latin and Greek have sprung from the same common source which no longer exists, we call it the proto language. All the 3 languages they have the same ancestor. The ancestry is the proto language that has contributed to the vocabulary or the lexical system of all the 3 languages that we have listed here.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:13)

Indic tradition



- Panini's principles:
 - i. Exhaustiveness (Within the limits which it sets itself)
 - ii. Consistency (no contradiction between different parts of the total statement)
 - iii. Economy (use of abbreviations and symbols)



To help you with understanding what is Panini's contribution or what are Paninian principles, I will not go into much detail. I will just give you three different phrases which are extremely significant when you try to understand Panini's works. First thing that you must note is Panini discussed exhaustiveness. So, when I say exhaustiveness, if you look at the slide, it is written within the limits which it sets itself. That means, Panini claimed that language is exhaustive, grammatical system is exhaustive. You just need to understand grammar that is it, you do not have to have any other tool to analyze such a system.

He also emphasized a lot on consistency. So, the grammar system or the grammatical system remains consistent always. So, what does it mean? It means there is no contradiction between different parts of the total statement. When you utter a total statement like I am going to school, it remains consistent as far as the meaning is concerned, no matter in which way you try to analyze it. The meaning of I am going to school is always the same, it remains consistent. If it is a total statement you have to consider it or you have to take it or you have to analyze it as a whole and when you analyze it as a whole, there has not been any change.

Finally, the third point that I want to highlight in the Indic tradition in Paninian school is he emphasized on economy of grammar. What do we mean by economy of grammar? Human language always tends to the economization of it. That is why we use a lot of abbreviations and we also use a lot of symbols. So, that gives us an idea that being humans, we always tend

towards the economy of any given language, for that matter, I would say big L or the human language. So, that is all about Indic tradition.

In this class, we primarily had some discussion. Let us try to wind it up now. We started the discussion with the history of language and linguistics as a discipline, how the Greeks studied it, how the Romans studied it, how Greco-Roman tradition evolved as a steady, strong, bold, discipline which put language at the forefront.

Then in the other side of the world, we had the Indic tradition where Panini contributed immensely to the study of language. What is the major contribution of Panini? Primarily the sound system was highlighted which was not studied as carefully before as it was done by Panini. However, Paninian contribution actually got a lot of recognition only by the Western scholars.

Until William Jones and other western scholars started working on the linguistic issues or the studies related to language, Paninian tradition was not much significant to the world. But once it has been rediscovered or once it has been put at the forefront, a lot of related claims came into existence, which is why we had a claim like Latin and Sanskrit sprang from the same language which could be a proto language.

These kind of bold, strong statements opened up many new avenues for linguistics research. All of them, I must say, would be a part of the linguistic typology, because when I am trying to approach this course from a typological framework, I must talk about what are the different types of languages available here and how do you decide which language belongs to which type.

So, that is the reason why we should not only appreciate linguistics as a discipline but also appreciate typology as a tool when we are trying to understand the issues related to language and linguistics. I will talk about Indo-European tradition in the next session.

Thank you.

Keywords: History of linguistics, the Greek tradition, the Roman tradition, the Greco-Roman tradition, the Indic tradition, Stoic philosophers, Alexandrian scholars, parts of speech,