

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

Lecture – 65
Conclusion

Hi, hello everyone, welcome to the final session of our NPTEL course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach. I remember delivering the introductory lecture at the beginning of the session and we have reached to the conclusion now; the course has come to an end. So, here I have a few concluding remarks. I just want to refresh your memory what all we have studied so far.

I am sure a lot of things have been comprehensible to you. There would be a couple of things which you could not understand. I would request you to write to me or to get back to me contact me whenever you find there is a difficulty, I will try to clarify your doubts as quickly as possible; maybe one or two live session live sessions can be conducted; maybe one, to clarify if you have any doubts further.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:27)



The slide is titled "Summarizing the course" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains a bulleted list of course objectives. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset showing the speaker, Dr. Anindita Sahoo, wearing a blue patterned top.

Summarizing the course

- This course:
 - i. Appreciates linguistics as an academic discipline that focuses on the understanding of what is natural language and what does systematicity of language comparison deals with
 - ii. investigates both the structure (form) and usage (function) of language
 - iii. Deals with the languages of the world in terms of the grammatical features they have in common
 - iv. Leads to the discussion on language types and their implications
 - v. Examines data from various language families to understand how various grammatical constructions are realized in different languages

Now, I will just give you the summarized form of the course content that we have had. But, before that let me give you an idea what this course was supposed to be, when I began with

this or when I started off this journey, what idea did I have in mind and let us see how far I have reached. I am not sure if I could reach the ultimate destination; whether all the objectives that I had and then all the course content that I have designed whether they are in alignment with each other or not; your feedback would tell me that.

Personally I believe yes, most of the components I have covered as I promised or as I planned so far and if a couple of things are left, it can be taken up in an advanced level course which I already have in plan in my mind. Sooner or later, I am going to offer little advanced level course as far as typology is concerned; maybe focusing on only the morphosyntactic component of it, that is my area of interest, that is my thrust area and then I love teaching morphology and syntax plus a bit of pragmatics.

Pragmatics has not been explored nicely in this course, I agree with that and that is how my plan was; my focus was supposed to be more on morphosyntactic aspect with lexical, phonological and semantics and pragmatic typology. But, pragmatic and semantic typology need to be fleshed out more, because these are the more advanced and more abstract level understanding. I am planning for the next course primarily on morphosyntactic and pragmatic or semantic or pragmatics typology of language. Let us see when I am going to achieve that.

But, first thing first, let us look at what this course was supposed to be. Let us begin with the day one, what I had in mind when I conceived this course, when I conceptualized the course plan. I start with the intention or the idea that I had when I thought about this course.

Primarily look at the first point, what was this course designed for, what was its objective; what was the intention of drafting such a course. It is considered to be an introductory course at the same time, it would link to some advanced concepts. It is like in the middle of introductory and advanced, I do not know maybe I can call it a mid level course.

But, I remember when I started off this journey I had this idea in mind that I am going to keep it very simple, almost like it will be meant for everyone. But, gradually I realized towards the end of the course, I became a more technical, jargon centric words have been used and I became a little more advanced which is ok, because when you kind of went through a couple of very simple units, you may expect the last stage of the course, towards

the completion of the course to give you some food for thought, so that you can think about a little advanced courses or little advanced components

To begin with, the primary objective of the course was to make the participants aware about the importance of linguistics as a discipline. I will share my story and it is the story of all linguists out there. The first question that we encounter from a non-linguist, for that matter a layperson, is that how many languages do you speak, and believe me this is the most irritating question. The second irritating question is that when I say I am teaching linguistics, I would encounter the next question, which language.

Teaching linguistics does not mean that we are teaching languages. Language teaching is an aspect of linguistics and it comes under the category or in the domain of applied linguistics; that is very much in the purview of linguistics, under the domain of linguistics, but that is not what I do. I do not teach languages period. I teach linguistics. Whether it is descriptive or prescriptive, that is a different story and we have already discussed a lot about it in the introductory sessions.

When I say I teach linguistics, I am trying to understand languages in general. It is the study of language, it is the scientific study. When I say scientific study, I have already mentioned, it is a more systematic, technical domain. So, for your kind information, I am not teaching any particular language be it English or Hindi or anything else for that matter. I do not know many languages. Much like an average Indian, I also speak three languages, because most of us are multilingual, believe me. These are the two questions that most linguists encounter, how many languages do you speak and which language do you teach as a linguist.

Then the third question sometimes I encounter which in IIT, I am not asked this very often, but a couple of colleagues have already asked me that when I am asked, which department do you come from, I would say I am from humanities and social sciences. What do you teach? I teach linguistics.

Then the next statement they would make is that would you please help me let us say copyediting my draft. Let us say they are writing a research proposal and they need

somebody to copyedit it or to proofread it or to sort of review it. Not technical review, it is just the stylistic review, formatting and other stuff, typos and stuff like that.

So, that is also another very frustrating situation that I find myself in most of the cases. That is also part of language. This particular profession is also covered under the domain of linguistics. But, linguistics is not restricted to just copyediting or translating or reviewing or proofreading or language teaching, it has a huge broader aspect like it has a huge broader domain which is extremely interdisciplinary in nature.

My idea was to make the participants aware about the vastness of linguistics as an academic discipline. That is why I chose this title appreciating linguistics and I proceeded further with a typological approach. I did find out which language belongs to which type and then what do we understand by language typology, how the formalists understand it, how the functionalists understand it.

So, these are a couple of different things. A lot of discussions we have had. If you look at what I have written on the slide; the very first point I have written, this course appreciates linguistics as an academic discipline. I hope after you completed this course, you would be a little more respectful for my discipline. Now this is your discipline to write.

If you are a beginner, if you have not had any linguistics course before, I hope this course might have ignited some kind of interest, respect and appreciation for this discipline after you complete this course. If you have already been there in linguistics, something like being there done that, if you have already done it and you know what linguistics is, and you are familiar with the basic fundamental conceptual things, I am sure after you finish this course, it would have helped you to appreciate it a little more.

Respect for this discipline might have ideally increased, it should have, I do not know whether it happened or not, I am really not sure about it. I will check the feedback later. But then I am sure at least some of you would have been more motivated, some of you would have been more interested to know about this discipline more and in a sense your appreciation for this discipline has been increased.

So, that is the reason why the title of the course was Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach. That is the first thing, this course appreciates linguistics as an academic discipline which focuses on the understanding of what is natural language. So, every now and then I kind of talked about language with the big L, language with a small l. What do you mean by natural language and then how natural language is in the introductory sessions.

I think I have already talked about it, how it is different from let us say machine language, how it is different from let us say sign language. So, these are the things you might have remembered from the very beginning. The course also focuses on the systematicity of language comparison. What does it deal with? When we say typology, that means, we are comparing languages systematically.

This systematicity of language would help us to understand how linguistics is not restricted just to language teaching or let us say proofreading or copyediting or translating, there are way more things to know about this discipline. The systematicity of language comparison would give us an idea how wide and how diverse the linguistic scenario of this world is. And taking into account South Asian languages or Indian languages, it is again a fantastic area to study more about linguistic typology.

In this course I did not really focus much on South Asian languages, I just gave you a couple of examples here and there from Hindi and Odia, because it was not really a South Asian language specific course. This was just a typological course from different languages of the world. My primary reference was Edith Moravcsik's book *Introducing Language Typology* published by Cambridge University press. I got the data and arguments everything directly from the book.

That has been my first point of reference and all the data, all the examples that you have seen mostly they have come from this book. I did not really include South Asian languages except maybe a couple of Hindi, Odia, Bangla examples I might have given once a while, but primarily its world's languages.

Then the second point, this course also investigates both the structure and then the usage of language. When I say structure, I am targeting the formal typology; when I say function, I am targeting the usage. When I say usage, I am targeting functional typology. So, we are just

now talking about the use of language. We are also talking about the form of language and when I say form or when I say structure, I am talking about the form of the sentence, form of the words, form of sound like form of the sound system.

It could be formal typology and functional typology at the lexical level, morphological level, syntactic level and phonological level. So, that is about formal and also the semantic level. In the functional level, we did talk about pragmatics which is very brief, I agree, it has been a very brief discussion on pragmatics typology because my plan is that I am going to offer another advanced level course in pragmatic typology in the days to come.

So, semantic and pragmatics typology I have put it very minimal, not really much extensive. I am aware about it. If you feel that it is very little, please pardon me because this is how the course was planned for this time. This course definitely investigates both the structure, which is the form of language, and usage, which is the function of language. We did bring in a lot of empirical evidences empirical examples, using those we have tried to understand the crosslinguistic generalizations at different levels as discussed in Moravcsik's book.

So, that is why the third point says this course deals with the languages of the world in terms of grammatical features they have in common. When I was talking about Arabic and Rapa Nui for example, or you can say Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages or Hindi and English for example, whether we are going to talk about Hindi and English as two typologically different languages or sometimes there is a mother language which links to these two that there must be some kind of similarity, some kind of differences, all of this has been discussed and the grammatical features of these languages have been discussed, if not widely but in quite a bit of detailed manner at various levels; sound level, word level, and sentence level. Then the discussion eventually leads to language types and then implications.

We talked about the implicational universals, absolute universals, we also found out how to identify certain universals in certain types and certain other universals in certain other type. When we talked about the universals, we did talk about the implications. Eventually the discussion went ahead with the language universals and related issues in language typology.

And finally, what the course was supposed to deal with is to examine the data and what data? The data from different languages in the world, the data from various language families, to

understand how various grammatical constructions are realized in different languages. When I say grammatical constructions let us take into account or let us take into consideration word order.

English is a language which has a different word order, Hindi is a language which has a different word order and when we are trying to study the word order and its evolution, we realized that it is actually SOV which is considered to be the oldest form of the word order and the rest of the forms have been derived later.

SOV and SVO are the most common ones, but OSV and OVS are the most rare ones and why these are the rare and why these are the most common ones; how go back and forth like the sentence final, sentence initial or the final stage, medial stage and initial stage when we were talking about we did have a discussion on that.

So, this is what the course was supposed to be, the course was meant to be and I hope I did justice to it by discussing issues related to let us say I started the discussion with linguistics and fundamental concepts, how to understand language typology and linguistics and what are the fundamental concepts involved here. The discussion kicked off from there or the course started from there, how to understand linguistics as an academic discipline and within that what do you mean my language typology.

Then I moved on to talk about lexical typology, which deals with words as a whole unit, then morphological typology which probes further and tries to break the words into different parts and subparts which are called morphemes. Then we tried to understand what are the generalizations which can be drawn at the lexical and the morphological level as far as typology is concerned. After the word level then we moved to the sentence level and in the sentence level we had syntactic typology which is absolutely formal in nature.

When I said I had a combination of formal discussions and functional discussions. Syntactic typology is the domain where I was primarily talking about generative aspect of language and how big L and what is innateness hypothesis, what do you mean by language acquisition device, and why a human child is considered to have a language by default in the brain by the

time she comes to the earth and then eventually we moved to the other type of logical generalizations which can be drawn at the sentence level. That is about syntactic typology.

So, what I did for all the units, I started with the discussions on individual terms, then I moved to typology, let us say I started with what is lexicon; introductory remarks on lexicon and after you understood what lexicon is then we moved to lexical typology. Similarly first I discussed what is a morpheme, what is morphology. After a couple of sessions on the discussion of morphology, we moved to morphological typology, something similar I did for syntactic and phonological typology too.

I first talked about what is a phoneme, what is an allophone, what is neutralization, what is allophone; these are all the introductory remarks related to the discipline called phonology. And once you have an idea what is a consonant, what is a vowel, what is a diphthong and how many diphthongs are there, how many vowels are there, whether it is say same across the board or different languages have different phonological system.

So, these are the introductory remarks related to linguistics as a discipline or phonetics as a branch of linguistics and once you understood that, I moved to phonological typology. Similar happened for syntactic typology too.

First I discussed what is syntax, what do you understand by the word syntax and why sentence is important and what are the different ways to understand, which sentence is grammatical, acceptable, unacceptable, ungrammatical; all these discipline specific jargons have been fleshed out and after that I have moved to syntactic typology. That has been the way I have worked throughout the course.

For semantics also I did the same and for pragmatics also I did the same, but the difference between semantics and pragmatics is that I did not really highlight the crosslinguistic generalizations as I did for the other units. For lexical, morphological, syntactic, phonetic or phonological, we did have discussions on the introductory remarks plus we moved to the crosslinguistic generalizations.

But, in case of semantic and pragmatic typology, it was more about the general discussions and how the meaning change happens. Because, I believe there has been a lot of overlapping

between semantic typology and pragmatic typology, because they are bound with the common thread that is meaning.

Both pragmatic typology and semantic typology talk about meaning and meaning change. That is why I have put them together and if time permits later maybe I will offer an advanced course related to semantics pragmatics apology in more detail.

After these domain specific discussions, eventually I moved to one of the most important sections of the course that is discussing language universals. What do you mean by universal, do you think there is something universal in the world's language, aAnd how the formalists understand universals and how the functionalists understand universals.

One school of thought talks about having bigger sample size, identifying commonalities or differences taking into account more number of languages into study. The other side of the school which is the formal type like the formal generative linguists, they would say or for that matter Chomsky; one is the Greenbergian or functional typological universal, the other one is Chomsky and green sorry, Chomsky and generativist approach.

So, in this case, universals have been studied not with a huge sample set rather with a restricted set of languages or restricted sample, but an in depth study. When I say in depth study, even if it is just a handful of five languages, but each of the grammatical situation or each of the grammatical features has been identified or has been examined in minute details. So, that is what formal typologists would do to understand universals.

On the other hand, the functional typologists would try to consider as many languages as possible, a huge sample size and taking into account how these grammatical features are manifested in different languages. That is how the crosslinguistic generalizations have been crafted. So, that was about language universal and language typology.

Plus, in the meanwhile, I have also discussed how language change has happened and typologically how we can account for it. When we say language change, I have discussed the diachronic approach plus the acquisition approach. In the acquisition approach, I have also included the use component of it, how a language has been used in the discourse.

When you talk about the diachronic, then we tried to figure out let us say word order, adposition and the noun phrase. If I remember it correctly, we also talked about the adjectives and stuff like that. But I clearly remember we did talk about the noun phrase and the adposition situation plus the word order.

Historically which is the form which seems to be older than the other one. Let us say SOV and SVO which one is older, which one is newer; similarly noun phrase an adposition, preposition and postposition which one is older which one is newer. So, these are the issues related to language change.

How language change has happened at a diachronic level, also at the acquisition level, because this very famous statement ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. So, in that case, how the child language acquisition gives us the theories or the understanding of child language acquisition gives us an idea about language change in a particular child language acquisition perspective. Language change using acquisition method and then using the diachronic method. These are the two ways by which typology and language change has been discussed.

So, in a nutshell, if you ask me, I have three different domains I have the domain centric linguistics: syntactic domain, morphological, phonological, semantics, this at one chunk which is the major portion of the course, almost 60 percent of the course includes this domain specific discussions, then maybe 20 percent you will get universals and the other 20 percent you will get typology or language change. That is how the course has been planned.

I sincerely hope I have executed in the same way too, without much deviation. A couple of deviations here and there is ok, because when you teach you become yourself. It may not go 100 percent as you have planned, but I am confident I am sure there has not been much deviation and what I promised I have delivered through the course. But whatever issues that you have faced, whatever challenges that you have had to understand my lectures, to understand my my teaching, I would look forward to the feedback from the participants so that if I have to work on this course again, that should help me to improve the course. So, do share the feedback and thank you for considering my course, for registering, for listening to me and I hope we are going to meet again through this platform maybe in future. And most importantly, I sincerely hope that this course has helped you to understand linguistics as an

academic discipline, since I am hopeful that it must have helped you too or it must have given you an opportunity to approach linguistics or to approach languages, even your first language, the languages that you speak or your mother tongue to approach it from a different angle. I am sure when you apply what you have studied so far in this course and when you try to understand your own first language now, you are going to approach it in a different manner.

So, thanks again for registering for this course and I am happy to get to know all of you and we have had a very good interactive session also and I look forward to more such interactions in future.

Thank you very much yeah.