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

Lecture – 07
Introduction to Morphology – Part 1

Hi. Hello everyone. Welcome to this session of my course. It is an NPTEL course as you already know, the title is Appreciating Linguistics: A Typological Approach. What I have been always repeating in all of my classes is that the primary objective of this course is to make you aware that linguistics as a discipline should be appreciated and there are multiple ways by which you can appreciate this discipline; typological approach is one of them.

We already had a brief discussion on what is typology and what are the primary objectives of a typologist and how to identify what language belongs to what type, very briefly we have discussed about it and then in the due course of time when we proceed further in the lectures, you will get to know more about typology. But if you check the syllabus, after the introductory sessions get over, I have units like morphological typology, phonological typology, syntactic typology. Then, we have semantic typology and finally, we have pragmatic typology.

So, all these subunits of this course titled as Appreciating Linguistics will have certain contents related to the sub domains of linguistics as a discipline. So, when I say sub domains, one major domain that linguistics as a course that deals with is morphology. So, I am going to talk about morphology today. Just a very brief introduction about what is morphology and then in the next lecture or may be a couple of lectures after this, we will move to morphological typology.

So, why am I bringing in morphology here? Primarily because I want you to know what morphology is. I assume a lot of you would be familiar with this. Those who have already had some basic level or foundation courses on linguistics, you must be aware about it. But there is no harm in refreshing the memory when you are talking about linguistics. So, if you are new to linguistics as a discipline, this unit is going to help you immensely. And if you

have already had some basic information about linguistics then, I will help you to recall what all you have studied in morphology.

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Background concepts

- One of the most fundamental units of language: WORD
- Words play integral role in the human ability to use language creatively.
- How many words do we know?
- Finite vocabulary and infinite number of expressions at various situations
- Open-ended vocabulary that contributes to our creativity.
- Human vocabulary is dynamic... add, delete and expand

My question here would be what is morphology? That is what I am going to address in this class and then I am going to talk about the morphological typology.How many of you know what morphology is? I am sure those who have had some basic information about linguistics would know that morphology is that domain of linguistics which deals with the study of words.

But if you ask me what is the root word of morphology then, I would say that this is not really the study of words, rather this is the study of morphemes. But not everyone knows what a morpheme is because morpheme as a word which is a jargon. Unless you are aware about this discipline-specific terms, it is not easy for you to know what a morpheme is because it is a technical term, a linguistics-specific jargon.

To begin with, we will find out how to approach morphology as a part of linguistics. Morphology is the systematic study or scientific study of words used in a sentence. So, I would ask you the first question when you utter long constructions, I mean the sentences in a language, what do you think is the most fundamental unit of language? What should be the most rudimentary unit or the most basic unit?

I am sure most of you would give me the answer that it is word and how to break the word into many parts that is the story that I am going to tell you now. But otherwise for a layperson if I ask you what is the basic thing in a sentence or what is the most rudimentary thing in a sentence, then the first answer I predict is word. Correct me if you think I am not right, but I think I am right.

It is going to be the word. That is the most fundamental unit of a language which can be spoken, which can be written also. Writing we will talk about it later, but as of now just let us focus on the words the way you speak. So, my concern here is that you need to understand a morpheme before you really understand morphological typology, and to understand what a morpheme is, you need to start it with the concept called word.

Let us find out what is the traditional or the conventional definition that you have about word. I am sure you have been studying multiple languages and English is surely one of them which is one of the most widely studied languages in the world. And you have been a student of English language, if not literature. Ever since you have started going to school English has been with you. So, all these years of English grammar studies, English language studies or for that matter literature studies, what do you think what is a word? How would you define it?

I should expect you to answer this question in the simplest form and if I recall how I was taught when I was a young school-going child, a word is primarily the collection of a few letters which will have some meaning, am I right? That is what we have been taught what a word is. In this case I would say this sounds to be a justified definition for a word called word, but it may not be sufficient because at least in a language like English, we have words which do not have many letters, they are simply one letter.

Can you tell me what should it be? What is that word which has only one letter? I am sure without any doubt everybody is going to tell me there is a word called 'I' which is the first person singular number. So, the letter 'I' is also a word and if it is a word, then the definition needs to change a bit. So, how are we going to change the definition or how we are going to understand it descriptively following the linguistic tools? We are going to check that a little later.

But remember the words could be a set of letters, it could also be just one letter. But what is most important it should have a complete meaning. It must have some meaning. Just the random arrangement of letters are nor going to contribute to make it a word. If I write c and then d and after that I am writing z, then I am writing s, that does not make any word. So, to form a word using letters, you have to arrange it in such a way that it will give you some meaning. That is why c a p is going to be a word, but c p p may not be a word in English.

Similar is the case with many of the other languages in the world, I would bring a lot of English examples because that is a lingua franca and I assume the medium of instruction is also English. So, I would definitely give you examples from English, but I would expect you to understand your own language. So, when I say a single letter can also make a word, think about whether it is true for your language as well. Do you think there is a word in your language which comprises of only one letter?

Do think about it and let me know. This might be an assignment question for you later. But for sure in English, we have at least the letter 'I' which can be a word. Now we will shift our attention to other aspects of morphology in your own language. So, I would give you the examples from English; a couple of other examples from other languages, but eventually it should be you who should be able to analyze the data from your own language and when I say own language, I am talking about your first language or your native language which you are most comfortable with; I am not saying that you must be comfortable with it, but you could be quite comfortable using this language in the day-to-day discourse plus the other thing is that you should have an intuition.

Intuition is the key here; intuition is actually important when you are thinking about linguistics as a discipline. If I say c p p is not an English word, the native speaker of English would find it weird. But a non-native speaker might not. So, we have all these spelling mistakes that we commit as non-native speakers of English, but very unlikely these kinds of mistakes are going to be made by a native speaker. The native speaker will have an institution to share with the world that this particular combination of letters could actually contribute to the making of a word.

So, that is what I expect you to do when I give you some assignments. Think about your own language and think about the words that you use in your language and with this information let us move to the next point. What do you think why are words important in any given language? Words are important. They will always be important because they say that the work that can be done using words may not be done using wars. Words are definitely more important or more relevant than the war. There are also words like the war of words. When you have a war of words, primarily you are engaged in a loaded debate that deals with the heated discussions and then, there has been a lot of argument and counter argument over it. You are giving your own views then the other person is also giving his or her count opinion about it. So, that is what we call a war of words.

Words are the tools which can be used in a creative way to bring newness or novelty in your speech. It all boils down to the words. How you play around with the words decides what is your creativity. The better the patterns, more the patterns, more creative you are as a person. I hope I am clear to all of you. If you think you know many words in a particular language, then your speech becomes more smooth. That means you do not fumble, you do not really falter while speaking.

The more words you know, better speech you should actually have. In this context, I would say words are extremely important in the human being's speech to use the language in a creative manner. It brings you creativity. The right kind of words for the right situation makes you a good speaker. Let us say you have some idea in your mind but you are not able to express it in a given language; that means you do not have enough words to express your ideas or views or opinions.

In that case I would say words are actually very important when you are trying to speak a particular language. So obviously, the next immediate question that arises is that what do you think how many words do we know? I am not giving you the answer. You think about it and before that I would ask you how many languages do you speak, considering we are in India? I assume most of my viewers are from India.

What do you think we, being Indians, are we multilingual or just speak one or two languages; monolingual, bilingual or multilingual? When I say monolingual, primarily we speak one

language and when I say bilingual, we speak two languages and when we say multilingual or plurilingual also you can say, we use many languages at the same time with equal ease, with equal proficiency, with equal comfort, with equal confidence.

Do you think you are a monolingual speaker or you are a bilingual speaker or you are a multilingual speaker? That is the question you need to think about. And whatever languages you are speaking, whatever might be the number, what do you think how many words do you have for each of the languages that you speak? I will give you my own example. I am in Odia speaker. Odia is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language which is my first language. I also speak English, almost like a native speaker.

We call it near-native fluency, I do speak Indian variety of English or Indian English you can say as you can hear from my speech. So, I am equally comfortable in English plus I also speak in Hindi, almost like a native speaker. So, in that case, I am surely a multilingual because I can switch easily among these 3 languages. While speaking Odia, I can move to Hindi. If I encounter a Hindi speaker, then I can quickly switch to English if the other person who I am communicating with is an English speaker.

Do you think you are also multilingual like me? And if you think you are a multilingual speaker or you know multiple languages, what do you think, how many words do we actually know? Do come back with some statistics. Consider it as an assignment and find out some information on how many words you actually know for each language that you speak.

Having said that, one thing I would safely predict that no matter whatever might be the vocabulary size that you have; you might have a huge number of words in the repository or you might be using a limited number of permutations and combinations of letters which would be eventually be considered as words, It is definitely finite. In your mental repository or the lexicon that you have, whatever number of words you know, it is limited or it is finite. But using those finite set of words, you can actually talk about infinite number of expressions.

Human emotion and human expressions are infinite in number. With just a set of finite vocabulary, you can actually create or you can actually communicate or express multiple expressions or multiple emotions at various situations. That is how the vocabulary is

important or the words are important. You are not playing around with the sentences much because sentences are in a way a bit rigid for most of the languages, which we have already discussed in the word order section of this course. We did talk about languages which have free word order and which have fixed word order.

English, for example, is a fixed word order language. It generally does not move its phrases freely to many places. On the other hand, Indian languages like Hindi or Odia or Bangla, are primarily free word order languages. We have a default system, that is for sure, but then we can actually play around with our words. There is a certain possibility up to which we can extend our freeness. This free word order has a certain limit, but using those number of words, you can actually express multiple emotions, multiple expressions and multiple situations. So, though the sentences are a bit rigid or the sentences are a little less flexible, choice of words or use of words for expressing different opinions or different emotions or different expressions, that is infinite. Your emotions are infinite, your vocabulary is finite.

But look at the power of the vocabulary that you have. With just a limited set of words that you have in your mental lexicon, you are actually able to explain so many expressions. That is why we need to study morphology carefully. We need to study the words carefully. aAnd that that is the reason why if you look at the last point of the slide, it is written human vocabulary is dynamic. You can add new words, you can delete the ones which are no more in use, you can also expand the vocabulary.

So, a particular word which has a meaning x could be extended to the meaning x, y and z. So, it might include broader definitions or the broader terms in that sense. That is why human vocabulary is surely dynamic in certain senses. But before we really understand morphology as a context, I am going to use some discipline-specific jargon. There is a point here which is written open-ended vocabulary that contributes to our creativity. I just mentioned that words are the tools which will help us to be creative, that is why I am not sure about you, but at least I do use very frequently this particular phrase 'play around with the words'.

So, when I say 'play around with the words', try to use the words in different ways, different manners, so that you can express your thoughts or your opinions or your ideas in a more creative manner. You can write better, you can speak better. Your language skills are going to

improve if you have that ability to play around with the words. Here I would like to introduce two discipline-specific terms to you; one is vocabulary which are open-ended and then, there is the other category of vocabulary which are closed-ended or we can say open class versus closed class vocabulary.

I will give you the examples later in detail, but as of now I will tell you briefly. The open class vocabulary they can be added, deleted and expanded. Let us say if I give you an example of a word let us say Taliban. So, when we use Taliban as a word in English lexicon t a l i b a n. It is a new addition; it is a it is a noun. Let us say the talibans are creating havoc in this particular area. So, in that case we are saying Taliban as a word was not a part of the English lexicon until and unless Talibans existed.

So, that is a new word which has come into existence. Similarly, we can also give a few Indian words for that matter. Let us talk about the word like ghee. So, ghee; the spelling of ghee is g h e e. If you try to figure out what ghee could mean, it is mainly clarified butter. But clarified butter would be a little different when you try to associate it with ghee in an Indian context. In an Indian context, ghee is always ghee. Ghee is not going to be considered as clarified butter, though etymologically or content-wise it is the same thing that you are talking about. So, this culture has a different name for it, the other culture has a different name for it.

So, these are the open class words, the open-ended words which might be added, deleted or expanded on the basis of the necessity of a particular culture that it belongs to. However, there are words like prepositions for that matter. Let us say on, over, behind, between, under; so these are the words which are extremely rigid and they follow a limited set of vocabulary or in the vocabulary or in the lexicon, their number is finite and in most of the cases, you just cannot alter them.

You cannot say for onto, ont is sufficient. If I say if I do not write onto rather I would write ont and I read it as ont that does not really make much sense. So, the number of prepositions has always remained constant in any given language. Some other examples are conjunctions: and, but, or; these are also certain words which have a specific number in the lexicon. The category of words which follow such rigidity would be known as closed class vocabulary.

One is the open class; the other one is the closed class. Open class vocabulary brings a lot of creativity. Closed class vocabulary can be used in different creative expressions, but they themselves are not addable or deletable or expandable. If I looked around in the English lexicon, in the different parts of speech we have: the nouns, the pronouns, then verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections; some of them are open class and some of them are closed class.

I just gave you the example of a preposition and conjunction, things which are closed class words. Nouns and adjectives and verbs would definitely be in the category of open class words because you can always create new words and these new words can be nouns, they can be verbs and they can be adjectives. Let me give an internet-specific example Google. When I say I Googled and I could not find anything about it in a discussion. In that case, Google has become a verb now. Nobody would say I Yahooed it or nobody would say I Operaed it. Nobody is going to do that, rather people would say I Googled it. So, google as a word has been synonymous with the search engines. So, please Google it and then let me know what is the information available about the particular statement.

So, if I ask you please go back after you finish my lecture and then try to google what are the new words that have recently been added in the English lexicon.So the use of the word Google itself is also bringing a lot of creativity. Since this is an open class word, I could actually create constructions like Googled or Googling. Googling also I can say, it sounds weird, but I think it can be used in certain specific discourses.

 For the adjectives also we do definitely create varieties of adjectives to emphasize the quality of a particular thing. When we say this is fantastic. We try to put fantastic and fabulous together and we say fantabulous. So, that is also a new adjective. What did you do? You got a part from one word fantastic, then the other part from the other word fabulous and put them together and you have created a new adjective.Since it is an adjective and it is a new one, you consider it as a creative expression or as a creativity of yours. Similar is the case like Google; Google as a verb and Google as a noun. This tests the creativity of your thinking ability of your language usage.

So, that is about the open class and closed class words. All that I want to say is that words are extremely important to understand the linguistics-related issues, definitions or for that matter any discussion that is even feebly connected with linguistics. So, if you do not know linguistics, then it is going to be a problem for you.