

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| h | Abbess Laghrour University of Khenhela | |
| | Faculty of Letters and Languages | |
| Module: Linguistics | Dept. of Letters and Foreign Languages | Level: First Year LMD |
| | English Division | |

Linguistics

1.1. What is Linguistics?

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. When we talk about language, we mean the human language, in contrast to other forms of communication such as animal communication. An individual who engages in such a rigorous and tasking procedure of language study is called a ‘linguist’. Linguists are professionals or language specialists who are equipped to analyze any language, regardless of whether they speak the language or not. Linguistics is the scientific study of language; it’s not the study of languages. By this we mean language in general, not a particular language. Linguistics does not study an individual language, it studies ‘language’ in general. Some of the definitions of linguistics are as under:

1. “Linguistics observes language in action as a means for determining how language has developed, how it functions today, and how it is currently evolving.” (G. Duffy)
2. “Linguistics is concerned with the nature of human language, how it is learned and what part it plays in the life of the individual and the community.” (S. Pit Corder)
3. “Linguistics tries to answer two basic questions:
 - a. What is language?
 - b. How does language work.” (Jean Aitchison)
4. “The scientific study of human language is called linguistics”. (Victoria A. Fromkin)

1.2. Is Linguistics a Science?

When we say that a linguist aims to be scientific, we mean that he attempts to study language in much the same way as a scientist studies physics or chemistry, that is systematically, and as far as possible without prejudice. It means observing language, forming hypotheses about it, testing these hypotheses, and finally constructing theories. In addition to this, the scientificness of linguistics lies in the fact that it is bound to four major principles which govern in language analysis:

1. **Exhaustiveness:** it means that the work has to be complete and thorough.
2. **Systematicness:** The work is characterized by order and planning
3. **Consistency and objectivity:** the work has to be clear and without contradiction.
4. **Economy:** the linguist is bound to use few words to mean much.

Linguists today understand their job as that of *descriptivism*, their purpose being to *describe* how people use language, not to *prescribe* how they *should* use it, i.e. *prescriptivism*. Linguists don't invent rules; they discover them. Linguists study language for the sake of its understanding.

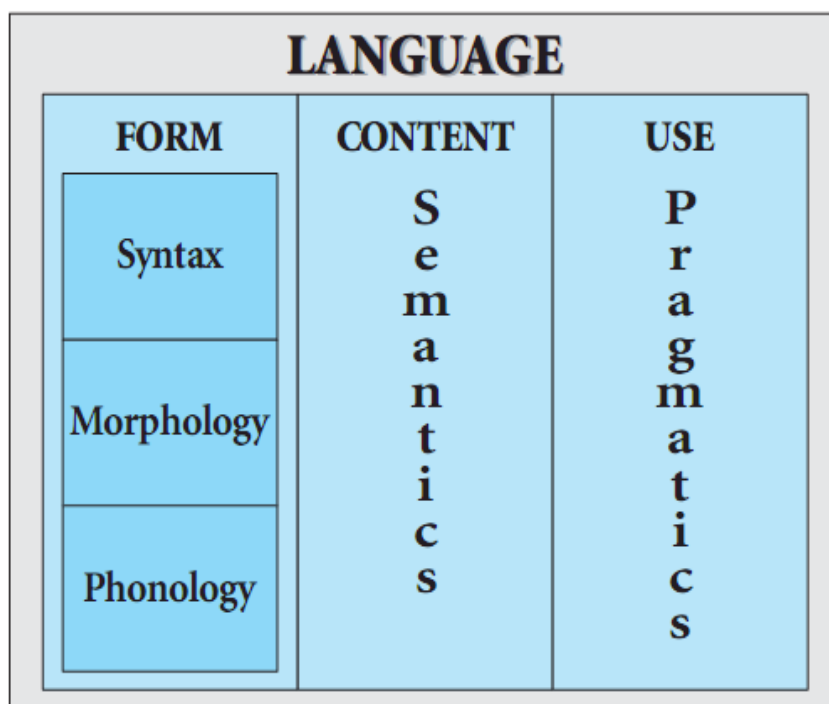
1.3. A Short Historical Overview of Linguistics

For more than 2,000 years, linguists have been trying to understand how language works. The earliest known linguist is The [Sanskrit grammarian Panini](#) (520 – 460 BC). He is often acknowledged as the founder of linguistics. He is most famous for formulating the 3,959 rules of the [morphology](#) of Sanskrit, an ancient Indian language. In the [Middle East](#), the [Persian](#) linguist [Sibawayh](#) made a detailed and professional description of [Arabic](#) in 760, in his monumental work, *Al-kitab fi al-nahw* (الكتاب في النحو), *The Book on Grammar*, bringing many linguistic aspects of language to light. In his book, he distinguished [phonetics](#) from [phonology](#). In the west the study of language began in ancient Greece. For **Plato**, linguistics is the study of word origins and especially origins of Greek words. With the broadening of trade routes and colonialism, in the 15th century, Europe encountered other languages which forced scholars to look for a universal grammar. In the 18th century, British linguists began to perceive the similarities between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin. In the 19th century, linguists were making historical comparisons between

languages to sort out the relationship and inheritance between languages. By the end of the 19th century, people shifted their attention from the history and development of languages to their structure and function. **Ferdinand de Saussure**'s book *Course of General Linguistics* was first published in 1916, and he was considered the forefather of modern linguistics.

II. Scope of Linguistics

A very complex system, language can best be explained by breaking it down into its functional components. Language can be divided into three major, although not necessarily equal, components: form, content, and use. Form includes syntax, morphology, and phonology, the components that connect sounds and symbols in order. Content encompasses meaning or semantics, and use is termed pragmatics. These five components—syntax, morphology, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics—are the basic rule systems found in language.



Components of Language

- a) **Phonology:** It is a detailed study of the sound system of a language.
- b) **Morphology:** This is the branch of linguistics that studies the internal structure of words and how words are formed in a language.
- c) **Syntax:** Syntax is the study of how words are arranged to form sentences.
- d) **Semantics:** Linguistic semantics examines the meaning and the change of meaning of words, phrases, and sentences.
- e) **Pragmatics:** Pragmatics is the study of the meaning of utterances in context.

III. Theoretical Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

Like other sciences, linguistics has a 'pure' or 'theoretical' aspect which is concerned with the building of theories about language and with description and analysis of particular levels of language such as phonology and syntax without regard to any particular applications that these may have. It also has an 'applied' aspect which is concerned with the application of that knowledge in areas such as the learning and teaching of languages, or correction and improvement of speech disorders, or in helping us to appreciate the use of language in literature. Thus, 'applied linguistics' covers many of the branches of linguistics that explore the practical application of the theories, concepts and analyses provided by linguists.

Linguistics and Other Sciences

A. Linguistics and Sociology: Sociolinguistics

1. Definition

Sociolinguistics is the branch of linguistics which studies *the relation between language and society*. It may also be usefully defined as the study of *variation* in language, or more precisely of variation within speech communities.

2. Types of Variation in Language

a) regional variation

When we refer to language variations within an area occupied by a language community, we speak of *dialects*. The many peoples that inhabit Germany, for example, the Frisians, Saxons, Bavarians, and many more each constitute a distinct group of people. The varieties of German spoken from the north to the south of Germany are only regional variations of the same language. The variations remain regional, because the German peoples have maintained close ties with one another throughout history. In many areas, it is the geography that allows a speech community to either merge or diverge. The vast mountain ridge of the Pyrenees dividing France and Spain, for example, separated the speech communities so that their linguistic development diverged.

b) social variation in language

A language variation may well reveal social rank. Middle class people, for instance, are confronted more often with theoretical topics, which is why they use more formal code more frequently than working class people do.

c) ethnic variation in language

Ethnic groups may speak a language which is different from that of the dominating society. The most outstanding example for ethnic variation in the English language is ***Black English Vernacular***. It has been cultivated to the extent that this same dialect is spoken by Blacks throughout the United States. One feature of Black English Vernacular is that verbal skills are valued very highly. What we know as rap, only recently made known to a wider public through pop music, has long been a means of poetic expression among blacks. Some street poets are able to do spontaneous rap rhymes of several hours' length.

d) gender and language variation

In most languages of the world, men and women do not speak identically. In English, some words are used more often by females than by males and vice versa. Some of the "female"

words are, for instance, "lovely, darling, cute". In speaking, males tend to speak a variety that is diverging from the standard while women's language tends to converge with the standard.

3. Bilingualism and Multilingualism

These are special cases of variation which come to exist where people speaking various languages meet and need to communicate. In *bilingual* communities, one language may signal *a degree of education* and another may indicate *friendliness*. The Belgian who switches from French to Flemish is not just showing that he has mastered two languages. He may be indicating his opinion of the listener, suggesting, for example, that he recognizes the listener as one who shares his cultural background. In multilingual communities, *lingua francas* (lingua franca is a common language used by speakers of different languages) have often grown up as a means of permitting communication where previously little or none existed. Interestingly, where such lingua francas have developed, whether in Africa, Asia, Australia or Europe, they show remarkable similarities.

Linguistics and Other Sciences

B. Linguistics and Anthropology: Anthropological Linguistics

1. Definition of Anthropological Linguistics

Anthropological linguistics is the study of *the relation between language and culture*. Anthropologists generally find it necessary to learn the language of the people they are studying, and they realized early that the languages themselves might provide valuable clues about the cultures under investigation. In the late nineteenth century, the anthropologist Franz Boas in the USA laid particular stress upon the importance of native American languages in the study of native American cultures and, thanks to his influence and that of his student Edward Sapir, American linguistics was largely born out of anthropology.

2. Function of Anthropological Linguistics

Anthropological linguists have been greatly interested in such topics as kinship systems, colour terms, metaphors, systems for conferring names upon people and places, connections between languages and myths, systems for classifying animals and plants, the treatments of space and time in languages, etc.

3. The concept of culture

The first really clear and comprehensive definition came from the British anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor. Writing in 1871, he defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Culture is shared by members of a society and learned rather than inherited biologically.

4. Language and culture

a) linguistic relativity

This refers to the idea that linguistic diversity reflects not just differences in sounds and grammar but differences in ways of looking at the world. For example, the observation that English-speaking North Americans use a number of slang words—such as dough, greenback, dust, loot, bucks, change, paper, cake, moolah, benjamins, and bread—to refer to money could be a product of linguistic relativity. The profusion of names helps to identify a thing of special importance to a culture. For instance, the importance of money within North American culture is evident in the association between money and time, production, and capital in phrases such as “time is money” and “spend some time.”

b) linguistic determinis

Linguistic determinism refers to the idea that language to some extent shapes the way in which people view and think about the world around them. Linguistic determinism is associated the ethnolinguistic research of Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf during the 1930s and 1940s. An extreme version of this principle holds that language actually determines thought and thereby shapes behaviour and culture itself. In the grammar of Hopi, a North American Indian language still spoken in Arizona, there is a distinction between “animate” and “inanimate,” and among the set of entities categorized as “animate” are clouds and stones. Whorf claimed that the Hopi believe that clouds and stones are living entities and that it is their language that leads them to believe this. English does not mark in its grammar that clouds and stones are “animate,” so English speakers do not see the world in the same way as the Hopi.

Linguistics and Other Sciences

C. Linguistics and Psychology: Psycholinguistics

1. Definition

This branch deals with the relationship between *language* and *the mind*, focusing mainly on how language is *learnt*, *stored* and *occasionally lost*. Psycholinguistics began to emerge as a distinct discipline in the 1950s.

2. Language acquisition

The basic fact calling for explanation in this area is the remarkably short time that a child takes to acquire an extensive knowledge of, and high degree of control over, the language or languages of his environment. Let us look a little closer at what a child of five can actually do: he can understand utterances that he has never heard before; produce sentences that are totally new to him and to the listeners; and he can use his knowledge of speech to acquire the new skills of writing and reading. He can do all of this because, somehow, he has managed to extract from the speech he has heard the underlying system of the language. Furthermore, he has acquired essentially the same underlying system as all his little friends, in spite of the fact that no two children are exposed to identical circumstances or to the same samples of language.

3. Theories of children's language learning

During the past sixty years there have been two main theories to account for the phenomenon of language learning by children. The first, known as ***behaviourism***, was fully formulated by B.F. Skinner in *Verbal Behaviour* (1957). This Theory claims that language learning in children can be accounted for in very much the same way as we can account for a dog learning to stand on its hind legs to beg for biscuit: *training*, *stimulation*, *imitation*, *reward* and *repetition*. The second theory, known as ***mentalism***, argues that just as human children are genetically programmed to walk when they reach a certain stage of development, so they are programmed to talk. Research suggests that all children of all nationalities, irrespective of race, class or intelligence, learn language in regular steps passing through *babbling*, *cooing*, *one-word utterances*, *two-word utterances*, *telegraphic speech* until their speech is indistinguishable from the adult norms of their community. Mentalists suggest that language is as natural a part in the development of human beings as the growth of the body. Given the right environment, that is, exposure to speech, a child automatically acquires language. Obviously, if a child is not exposed to language he will not learn it.

4. Language disorders

As far as the brain and the mind are closely related, the term *neurolinguistics* appears frequently to be used for what are, essentially, psycholinguistic studies of neurologically based language disorders. The principle language disorders are aphasia, anomia, dyslexia, and dysgraphia. Usually, language disorders are caused by injuries or malfunctions of the brain.

a) aphasia: This is a disorder in the ability to process or produce spoken language. Two scientists, the French surgeon Paul Broca and the German neurologist Carl Wernicke, were able to locate two areas of the brain responsible for these activities. Both Broca's and Wernicke's areas are located in the left half of the brain. *Broca's area* is responsible for the organization of language production. If it is damaged, the patient usually knows what (s)he wants to say but can't organize the syntax. More nouns than verbs are used. There is hesitant speech and poor articulation. *Wernicke's area*, however, is responsible for the comprehension of language. Wernicke's patients show the tendency to retrieve only general nouns and nonsense words from their mental lexicon and to lose specific lexis, or vocabulary.

b) anomia: Anomia is the loss of access to certain parts of the lexis. Anomia patients are unable to remember the names of things, people, or places. There is often a confusion between semantically related words. Undoubtedly, you will have experienced this phenomenon yourself! We are all prone to it at times. It usually increases with age, although pure anomia is a much more acute state and is not related to aging.

c) dyslexia: This is a disorder of reading where the patient is not capable to recognize the correct word order. Patients also tend to misplace syllables. There is also an overgeneralization of the relation between printed words and their sound value. For example, a patient may transport the pronunciation of "cave" = /keiv/ to "have" = /heiv/ instead of /hæv/.

d) dysgraphia: Dysgraphia is a disorder of writing, mainly spelling. Patients are not able to find the correct graphemes when putting their speech into writing. Also, they are not able to select the correct order of graphemes from a choice of possible representations.