

The Magical Majesty of Linguistics

Dr.Sujani Tata, Head English Section & Associate Professor, Sri Vasavi Engineering College, Tadepalligudem

Abstract

“The Magical Majesty of Linguistics” discusses the significance of Linguistics, the Structural approach and Cognitive approaches of Language learning. The structural approach builds the syllabus on structures and grammatical items. In structural methodology, language is viewed as a system of structurally related elements – syllables, words, structures for encoding of the meaning of a sentence and the main characteristics of this approach. It also mentions about Chomsky’s Cognitive approach and refers to the features of language like Arbitrariness, Discreteness, Reflexiveness and Creativity. It concludes saying how, these features helped in forming a language and became a part of accepted usage and shows the difference between applied linguistics and socio-linguistics.

Keywords: Linguistics, Language, Structural, Cognitive, Approach, Features of Language.

INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is the science of language, a means to express views and a vehicle of thoughts. It plays a vital role in constructing the nation’s ideology and forming culture and viewing society as an institution that transforms human race into a civilized form of living beings. Thus it is the language, which differentiates human beings from the rest of the species. Acquiring mother tongue is an effortless task. It requires no practice, as language is ubiquitous and is very natural. But when it comes to grammar and pronunciation, there is much to think of and in fact Linguistics is a way to help people solve the problems of language. Linguistics is not about the usage of language but it is the objective study of language. There are different approaches to study linguistics. The most important approaches are structural approach and cognitive approach.

Structural approach: The second phase in the development of linguistics started during the late 19th century with the emergence of linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure in Europe and Leonard Bloomfield in America. The structural approach is a technique where in the learner masters the pattern of sentence structures or different arrangements of words in an accepted style of the other. It includes various modes in which clauses, phrases or words might be used. It is based on the assumptions that language can be best learnt through a scientific selection and grading of the structures or patterns of sentences and vocabulary.

The structural approach builds the syllabus on structures and grammatical items. In structural methodology language is viewed as a system of structurally related elements – syllables, words, structures for encoding of the meaning of a sentence. The structural approach was introduced in Madras state and later it became popular all over the country.

For structural approach grammar or structure is the starting point in teaching a language. It also focuses and completely aims at presentation and practice of carefully related and graded structures in effective meaningful situations.

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS APPROACH ARE:

Language learning begins with spoken form, therefore, material is taught orally before it is presented in written form.

2. Difficult areas of the language are identified and dealt accordingly.

3. The oral presentation and practice of the structures and vocabulary enable the learner to gain mastery.

4. The language is presented systematically as the structures and vocabulary are selected and graded according to the levels of learning.

COGNITIVE APPROACH

As its name implies the cognitive approach deals with mental processes like memory and problem solving. By emphasizing mental processes, it places itself in opposition to behaviourism which largely ignores mental processes.

Chomsky rejected the structuralist view that the function of linguistics was simply to provide a classification and a terminology to talk about language. He argued that the linguistic theory must be able to capture the psychological aspect of the knowledge of the language.

FEATURES OF LANGUAGE

The most important features of Language are Arbitrariness, Discreteness, Reflexiveness and Creativity.

A. ARBITRARINESS - as a feature of human language Arbitrariness is a feature which means the absence of any natural or necessary connection between a word’s meaning and its sound or form. That means there is no inherent connection between sounds and the objects they refer to.

There is nothing scientific or logical about the relationship between words and meanings they indicate. For example the linguistic form of the word like ‘lion’ has no natural or iconic relationship with that of a four-legged ferocious animal. There can be no logical explanation why

it refers to that particular animal in the world not to a human being, a bird, or a flower. A few people in the society accepted it as a word of English language.

Finally, this aspect of relationship between linguistic forms and objects is described as arbitrariness.

B.DISCRETENESS

As a feature of human language, it has many discrete units like phonemes, syllables, morphemes, words etc. These discrete units can be recombined to mean different things. For example with the help of three discrete units like p, o, t. we can create pot, top, opt. In the same way with the help of a, p, t, we can create apt, pat, tap. We can say that this is possible only with human language and not with any form of other communication. This is possible only with human language and not with any other form of communication.

Ex: (i) with the help of o, w, n we can create words like now, won, own etc.

(ii) with the help of a,r,m we can create arm, ram, mar.

A major difference between animal language and human language is discreteness. This refers to uniqueness of sounds used in human language. Every language uses a set of different sounds. Each of these are different from the rest.

REFLEXIVENESS: Using language to talk about the language which involves ability to speak of abstract things. We can say that it is one of the Charles Hockett's 16 design features of language which states that in a language the speaker can use his or her language to talk about the language. That means speakers of a language are able to have knowledge about their language and be able to reflect upon it. Reflexiveness refers to the ability to use a language system to explain its own system. That is, a language is used to explain its own grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, syntax etc.

CREATIVITY: Creativity is the units of a language combined to form various meaningful sentences. Given any topic a sentence which is never heard or said can be produced following some basic principles of construction. This feature refers to the fact that human language has the ability to produce new messages on any topic at any time. That is the same limited sets of phonemes are combined in a novel form to give novel messages.

Example :People in future will use Cheetahs to move from one place to another place or from one country to country.

2. I had a pleasant dinner with a lion last night.

Hence, this way of constructing a sentence, therefore involves creativity or productivity. These sentences might be novel sentences which I don't think they ever heard or read anywhere.

APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND SOCIO LINGUISTICS

Applied linguistics uses the linguistic theories, methods and findings to explicate the problems of foreign languages that arise not only in teaching and learning but also in fields like stylistics, lexicography, translation, language planning etc. The inter connectivity between people, society and language forms the crux of sociolinguistics. Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion is the best example that shows how people of different social identities speak and how a flower girl is transformed into a lady

a..Phonetics and phonology

Phonetics is the study of speech sounds. It discusses how sounds are articulated, transmitted and received. Phonology is the study that organizes the units of the sounds of speech into syllables. It describes the systems and patterns of sounds in a particular language.

b. Comparative and descriptive linguistics

Comparative linguistics or typological linguistics is the study of similarities and differences that exist in various languages to reconstruct their parentage with lost languages, while descriptive linguistics is the study that analyses and describes the actual use of language. It establishes the facts of a particular language.

c. Neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics

Neuro linguistics studies the neural mechanisms of human brain that controls the processes of comprehension, production and acquisition of language, whereas Psycholinguistics studies the relationship between linguistic behaviour and psychological processes of thought underlying it.

e.Synchronic and Diachronic linguistics

The distinction between Synchronic linguistics and Diachronic linguistics was introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure. Synchronic linguistics is the study of linguistic elements and use of language in some defined spatial region during a particular point of time. In contrast to this, diachronic linguistics is concerned with the study of language development over a period of time ranging from old English period to the current era.

CONCLUSION

Thus the subject matter of Linguistics is all natural languages, living or dead. Linguistics adopts various methods to observe record and analyse the data related to subject matter, namely, language. The structural approach and cognitive approach are interconnected and both have their own significance in the process of learning and usage. The various features of language help us understand the overview of the development of language and how the words have come into vogue. They also mention that there is no particular logic or reason for a

particular word name. It has been accepted since people start recognizing or accepting it with the given name. So the systematic study or the scientific study of language shows the approach and scientific way of resolving learners' language problems. Hence it is the magical majesty of Linguistics that directs language learners in the right path.

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