

Lecture №04: Major Objectives of Linguistics

Modern linguists concern themselves with many different facets of language: how languages are structured, how languages are used, and how they change.

1. Language Structure

Perhaps the most important fundamental assumption is that human language at all levels is rule-governed. Every known language has systematic rules governing pronunciation, word formation, and grammatical construction. Furthermore, the way in which meanings are associated with phrases of a language is characterized by regular rules. Rules of language structure operate at various levels:

Language Levels	Category of Rules
Phonological level	Linguistic rules at this level describe how sounds are pronounced in various positions.
Morphological level	Rules of morphology focus on how words (and parts of words) are structured.
Syntactic level	Rules of language structure at this level deal extensively with how phrases, clauses, and sentences are structured.
Semantic level	Linguistic rules at this level specify precisely what words mean and how they combine into sentence meanings.
Pragmatic level	Linguistic rules at this level specify how the meaning of an utterance is interpreted differently according to situation.

For example, at the level of syntax, one common way languages are classified is to group them according to the dominant word orders that they exhibit:

Word order	Examples of languages
Subject Object Verb	Hindi, Japanese, Kurdish, Latin, Persian, Turkish
Subject Verb Object	English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese
Verb Subject Object	Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Irish
Verb Object Subject	Aneityan (Austronesia), Baure (Bolivia)
Object Verb Subject	Apalai (ancient Indo-European language of northwest Anatolia)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the attention of the world's linguists turned more and more to the study of grammar—in the technical sense of the term the organization of the sound system of a language and the internal structure of its words and sentences. By the 1920s, the programme of 'structural linguistics', inspired in large part by the ideas of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, was developing sophisticated methods of grammatical analysis.

2. Language Use

Linguistics, the scientific study of language, concerns itself with all aspects of how people use language and what they must know in order to do so. Language use is an inherently social phenomenon. How you speak depends on such factors as *where* you grew up, your *racial* and *ethnic* identity, whether you are a *woman* or *man*, *whom* you are *addressing*, your *job*, and your *education*. That is, you use the variation in language as a creative means of expressing who you are (and who you are not). Technical terms such as *standard language*, *dialect*, *accent*, *register*, *Jargon*, and *Slang* are used by linguists to refer to different variations of language use.

a. standard language: a variety of a language considered by its speakers to be most appropriate in formal and educational contexts. For example, the sentence "Many students are ill" is written in Standard English whereas the sentence "Lots of students are ill" is not.

b. dialect: a regional or social variety of a language in terms of grammar and vocabulary. For example, the English of London is noticeably different from the English of Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow, New York, New Orleans, or Sydney. For example,

British English	American English
elevator	lift
flat	apartment
first floor	ground floor
He dived into the pool	He dove into the pool
We should leave by ten to/past eight	We should leave by ten of/after eight

c. accent: a regional or social variety of a language in terms of pronunciation, a particular way of pronouncing a language. As far as English is concerned, we can cite many examples of

accents: American accent, Scottish accent, working-class London accent, French accent, Indian accent, Spanish accent, etc.

e. register: a conventional way of using language that is appropriate in a specific context, which may be identified as situational (e.g. in church), occupational (e.g. among lawyers) or topical (e.g. talking about language). We can recognize specific features that occur in the religious register (*Ye shall be blessed by Him in times of tribulation*), the legal register (*The plaintiff is ready to take the witness stand*) and even the linguistics register (*In the morphology of this dialect there are fewer inflectional suffixes*).

g. Jargon: special technical vocabulary associated with a specific area of work or interest. For instance, the phrase *Zanaxyn is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug for arthritis, bursitis and tendonitis* is an example of medical jargon.

f. Slang: slang is more typically used among those who are outside established higher-status groups. Slang, or “colloquial speech,” describes words or phrases that are used instead of more everyday terms among younger speakers and other groups with special interests. The word 'bucks' (for dollars or money) has been a slang expression for more than a hundred years, but the addition of 'mega-' ('a lot of') in 'megabucks' is amore recent innovation, and 'benjamins' (from Benjamin Franklin, on \$100 bills).

3. Language Change

Language change is both obvious and rather mysterious. Historical linguistics is concerned with both the description and explanation of language change. All languages undergo change over time. Linguists study language change by addressing the following questions: Can we trace the evolutionary path of a language? How do language changes spread through communities? How do historical circumstances influence language change?

a. The Historical Evolution of English

English has undergone continuous and dramatic change throughout its three major periods Old English (roughly from 450 to 1100), Middle English (from 1100 to 1500), Early Modern English (from 1500 to 1700) and Modern English (from 1700 to the present). While Chaucer's Middle English is at least partially comprehensible today, Old English looks like a completely foreign language.

Old English	Modern English
<p>Alegdon tha tomiddes maerne theoden Haeleth hiofende hlaford leofne Ongunnon tha on beorge bael-fyra maest Wigend weccan wudu-rec astah Sweart ofer swiothole swogende leg Wope bewunden</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(Beowulf, 7th century)</i></p>	<p>The sorrowing soldiers then laid the glorious prince, their dear lord, in the middle. Then on the hill the war-men began to light the greatest of funeral fires. The wood-smoke rose black above the flames, the noisy fire, mixed with sorrowful cries.</p>
Middle English	Modern English
<p>Whan that Aprille with his shoures swote The droghte of Marches hath perced to the rote <i>(Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, about 1387)</i></p>	<p>When April with his sweet showers has struck to the roots Dryness of March</p>

Early Modern English	Modern English
<p>DUNCAN: Whence cam'st thou, worthy thane? <i>(William Shakespeare, Macbeth, about 1606-7)</i></p>	<p>DUNCAN: Where did you come from, worthy Lord?</p>

The Existence of such differences between early and later variants of the same language raises questions as to how and why such languages change over time. Language change occurs mainly as a result of events that are related to political, economic, social, religious, educational, and technological factors such as wars, invasions, the spread of education, new inventions, immigration, new religions, etc.

b. Aspects of Language Change

- Sound Change:** Changes in sound are somewhat harder to document, but at least as interesting. In a number of changes from Middle to Modern English, some sounds disappeared from the pronunciation of certain words, in a process simply described as *sound loss*. The initial [h] of many Old English words was lost, as in *hlud*→*loud* and *hlaforð*→*lord*. Some words lost sounds, but kept the spelling, resulting in the “silent letters” of contemporary written English. Word-initial velar stops [k] and [g] are no longer pronounced before nasals [n], but we still write the words *knee* and *gnaw* with the remnants of earlier pronunciations. During the so-called “Great Vowel

Shift” 500 years ago, English speakers modified their vowel pronunciation dramatically. This shift represents the biggest difference between the pronunciations of so called Middle and Modern English. For example, the word *house* was pronounced /hu:s/ by Middle-English speakers, /həʊs/ by Early Modern-English speakers, and /haus/ by Modern-English speakers.

- **Semantic Change:** Semantic change occurs through three main processes: borrowing, broadening, and narrowing. **Borrowing** means copying words used in other languages. For example, the following words, whose meanings underwent semantic change, were borrowed from French: café, chef, chauffeur, rouge, phrase, sensible, journal, journey, lecture, petrol, actual, and ignore. Another process is the **broadening** of meaning. An example of broadening of meaning is the change from “holy day” as a religious feast to the very general break from work called a “holiday”. Another example is the modern use of the word “dog”. We use it very generally to refer to all breeds, but in its older form (Old English “docga”), it was only used for one particular breed. The reverse process is called **narrowing**. For example, The Old English version of the word *wife* could be used to refer to any woman, but has narrowed in its application nowadays to only married women.
- **Syntactic Change:** While vocabulary can change quickly, sentence structure—the order of words in a sentence—changes more slowly. Some noticeable differences between the structure of sentences in Old and Modern English involve word order. In Old English texts, we find the Subject-Verb-Object order most common in Modern English, but we can also find a number of different orders that are no longer used. For example, the subject could follow the verb, as in “ferde he” (“he traveled”), and the object could be placed before the verb, as in “he hine geseah” (“he saw him”), or at the beginning of the sentence, as in “him man ne sealde” (“no man gave any] to him”).

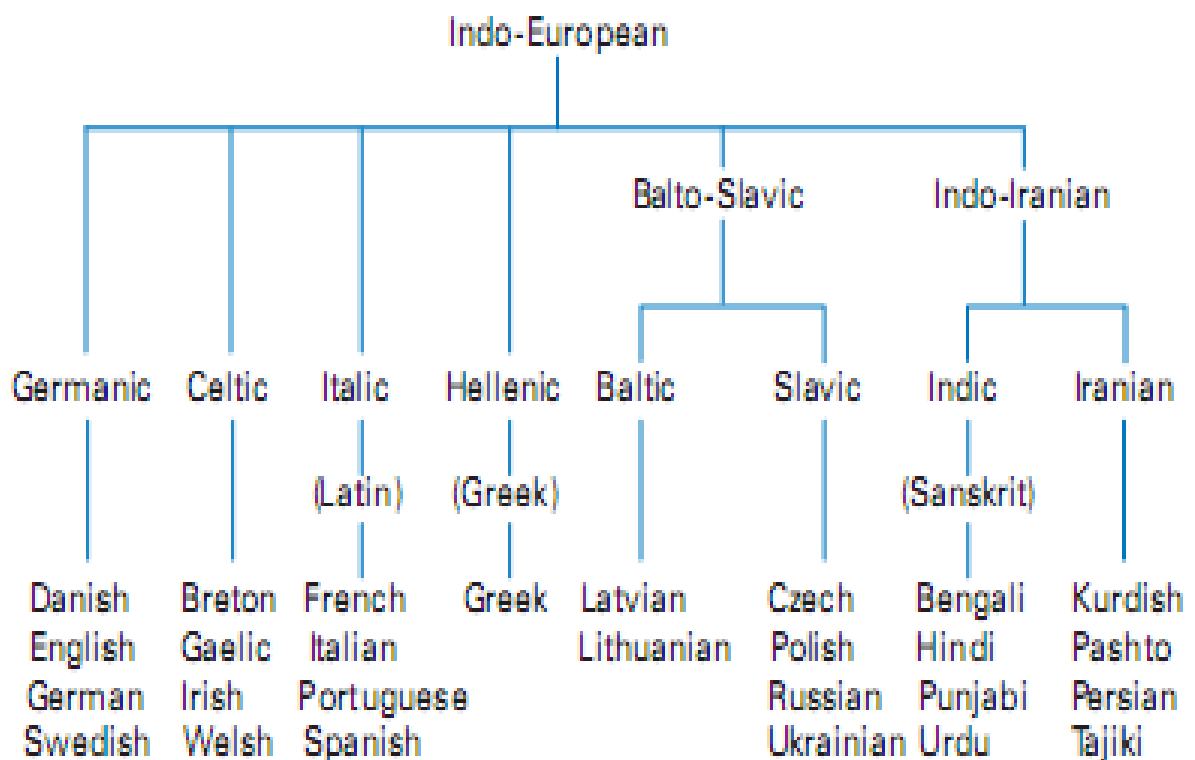
c. Language Families

Languages change very slowly. But once they do, we end up with a family of languages. A language family is a group of languages with a common origin. Linguists have given a name to the family. For instance, the Romance family consists of the parent language (Latin) and the daughter languages (French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese). We also say that French and Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian are sister languages. Some samples from European languages will illustrate this:

English	German	French	Italian	Spanish
Hand	hand	main	mano	mano
Life	leben	vie	vita	vida
Summer	sommer	été	estate	estio

Thus, it could be seen from these examples that English and German constitute one group, and French, Italian, and Spanish another group.

The common origin is postulated to have been a single language, referred to as a **proto-language**, that was spoken at a certain time in the past. Through the ages that proto-language broke up into dialects. As time went by, these dialects become increasingly more different from each other, ending up as different languages, primarily due to geographical distance. These languages developed dialectal differences, and the whole cycle was repeated, many times. The major language families in the world are *Afro-Asiatic* (353 languages spoken in Africa and Asia), *Austronesian* (1 246 languages spoken in Asia and Oceania), *Indo-European* (430 languages spoken in Asia and Europe, and in European settlements in other parts of the world), *Niger-Congo* (1 495 languages spoken in Africa), *Sino-Tibetan* (399 languages spoken in Asia), and *Trans-New Guinea* (561 languages spoken in New Guinea and adjacent islands). the branches of the Indo-European language family are illustrated in diagram below:



4. Microlinguistics and Macrolinguistics

In Microlinguistics, the linguist adopts a narrower view of language whereas in macrolinguistics s/he adopts a broader view of language.

a. Microlinguistics

Microlinguistics deals with the description and explanation of the structure of a language system, without regard to any extralinguistic factors such as the social, cultural, psychological, and biological factors that are involved in language behaviour. In short, microlinguistics is concerned with language 'in itself and for itself'.

b. Macrolinguistics

Macrolinguistics is the scientific investigation of language in the context of extralinguistic factors. For example, language could be dealt with from a psychological, a sociological, an ethnological, a philosophical, and a neurological point of view. Hence, we can identify combinatory disciplines like psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, philosophy of language, and neurolinguistics.