

Stages of developments in linguistics

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. It involves an analysis of language form, language meaning, and language in context.

Linguistic study was originally motivated by the correct description of classical liturgical language, notably that of Sanskrit grammar in ancient India, or by the development of logic and rhetoric in ancient Greece, leading to a grammatical tradition in Hellenism. Beginning around the 4th century BCE, China also developed its own grammatical traditions. Traditions of Arabic grammar and Hebrew grammar developed during the Middle Ages, also in a religious context.

Modern linguistics began to develop in the 18th century with work almost entirely centering around Indo-European studies and leading to a highly elaborate and consistent reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European language. The first half of the 20th century was marked by the structuralist school, based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure in Europe and Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield in the United States. The 1960s saw the rise of many new fields in linguistics, such as Noam Chomsky's generative grammar, William Labov's sociolinguistics, Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and also modern psycholinguistics.

In the early 20th century, de Saussure distinguished between the notions of *langue* and *parole* in his formulation of structural linguistics. According to him, *parole* is the specific utterance of speech, whereas *langue* refers to an abstract phenomenon that theoretically defines the principles and system of rules that govern a language. This distinction resembles the one made by Noam Chomsky between competence and performance, where competence is individual's ideal knowledge of a language, while performance is the specific way in which it is used.

19th century and the birth of linguistics

During the second World War, North American linguists Leonard Bloomfield, William Mandeville Austin and several of his students and colleagues developed teaching materials for a variety of languages whose knowledge was needed for the war effort. This work led to an increasing prominence of the field of linguistics, which became a recognized discipline in most American universities only after the war.

In 1965, William Stokoe, a linguist from Gallaudet University published an analysis which proved that American Sign Language fits the criteria for a natural language.

During the 18th century conjectural history, based on a mix of linguistics and anthropology, on the topic of both the origin and progress of language and society was fashionable. These thinkers contributed to the construction of academic paradigms in which some languages were labelled "primitive" relative to the English language. Within this paradigm a primitive people could be discerned by their primitive language, as in the case of Hugh Blair who argued that Native Americans gesticulated wildly to compensate for poor lexicon of their primitive language. Around the same time, James Burnett authored a 6 volume treatise that delved more deeply into the matter of "savage languages". Other writers theorized that Native American languages were "nothing but the natural and instinctive cries of the animal" without grammatical structure. The thinkers within this paradigm connected themselves with the Greeks and Romans, viewed as the only civilized persons of the ancient world, a view articulated by Thomas Sheridan who compiled an important 18th century pronunciation dictionary: "It was to the care taken in the cultivation of their languages, that Greece and Rome, owed that splendor, which eclipsed all the other nations of the world".

In the 18th century James Burnett, Lord Monboddo analyzed numerous languages and deduced logical elements of the evolution of human language. His thinking was interleaved with his precursive concepts of biological evolution. Some of his early concepts have been validated and are considered correct today. In his *The Sanscrit Language* (1786), Sir William Jones proposed that Sanskrit and Persian had resemblances to Classical Greek, Latin, Gothic, and Celtic languages. From this idea sprung the field of comparative linguistics and historical linguistics. Through the 19th century, European linguistics centered on the comparative history of the Indo-European languages, with a concern for finding their common roots and tracing their development.

In the 1820s, Wilhelm von Humboldt observed that human language was a rule-governed system, anticipating a theme that was to become central in the formal work on syntax and semantics of language in the 20th century. Of this observation he said that it allowed language to make "infinite use of finite means" (*Über den Dualis*, 1827). Humboldt's work is associated with the movement of **Romantic linguistics**, which was inspired by *Naturphilosophie* and Romantic science. Other notable representatives of the movement include Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel and Franz Bopp.

It was only in the late 19th century that the Neogrammarian approach of Karl Brugmann and others introduced a rigid notion of sound law.

Historical linguistics also led to the emergence of the semantics and some forms of pragmatics (Nerlich, 1992; Nerlich and Clarke, 1996).