

# Linguistic – A Historical Survey

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**Abstract:** --The study of language is almost as old as language and civilization, though the growth of the modern science of linguistics as we know it now is fairly recent. There is discussion on the importance and origin of language in many ancient religious texts including the Bible and the Vedas language was studied on a systematic basis in ancient India and ancient Greece and Rome. These studies established the foundation for subsequent developments. Some of the ideas and methods of these traditional schools are discussed briefly below, as this will help us understand the growth of modern linguistics and the work and contribution of thinkers such as a Bloomfield and Saussure.

**Keywords:** --Ontogeny, Morphology, Parole, Structuralism, Dichotomy.

## Introduction

All natural languages of which English is only one example out of nearly three thousand now spoken are historically developed socially learned, orally transmitted system of communication “modern linguistic” while laying emphasis on studying the structural aspect of language, is likely to neglect the importance of the historical study of language. It is always possible to study any language in either of two ways. First of all there is the language study known as synchronic linguistics. In this kind of study we are considering language purely as a system of communication operating at given time and disregarding the way in which the system has been changing through time and still continuing to change through use. The right kind of language study, on the other hand, is what is called diachronic linguistics. It involves the historical study of language. “The aim of the historical study of language is to obtain a full understanding of a language by concentrating not only on its present form and factors but also on its history and development. In other words the aim of the historical study of language is to acquaint the student not only with the anatomy and physiology of the language but also with its physiology and “Ontogeny”.

## Influence of Anglo-Saxon:-

There are a good many reasons why a man should make a historical study of his language. Because history has made man what we have to study history to understand something of the past. A man can study the history of his nation or people properly and fully only if he has acknowledged of the history of his own language. In studying the history of English language one finds that after the Norman Conquest while animals like

Ox  
Sheep  
Deer  
Calf  
Swine

Were still known by their Anglo-Saxon names the flesh of those animals as used for food was developed by French words like

Beef  
Mutton  
Vension  
Veal  
Pork  
Becon

This shows how the Saxon serf had the change of the animals when alive though, after being killed for meat they were eaten by the Norman masters. This single example would serve to indicate how the history of a nation is reflected in its language. Hence the history of the language is to be studied as something closely bound up with the history of the people speaking it.

In making a historical study of language, the following method recommended C.L. Wren may very well be adopted. Here one has to begin with the principles of language study universally followed at present. It will be profitable, in this connection, to become familiar with the works of Bloomfield, Wyld, Sweet and Sapir on the subject. Another useful book on the subject which is to be studied along with those mentioned above is L. Lrban's book entitled 'language and reality' (New York 1935).

The student is now ready to attempt the study of formal historical grammar like that of Henry Sweet's. "A new English Grammar", logical and historical (Oxford 1892). From this he should proceed to a short history of the language like that of H.C. Wyld in England or A.C. Bangh in America. The next step is to read some passages of different types of English belonging to different periods in the history of the language. This can be more profitably done if the student cultivate the habit of using the shorter Oxford English dictionary as it shows the changes in the meanings of the words during the whole modern English period. After using this dictionary as a companion to his reading for some time, the student should proceed to make use of the new English dictionary. Its ten large volumes deal with the whole development of language since the twelfth century and include the etymologies of all English words. For new meanings and words which have come into use since the publication of "the new English dictionary" the student must consult its supplementary volume published in 1933. He can also be helped by Skeat's interesting work "principles of English etymology".

Having arrived at this stage, the student would have obtained some idea of general linguistic principles, the uses of the phonetic methods of transcription and the ability to use a dictionary made on historical lines and he would have read for himself specimens of English literature belonging to the different periods in the history of the language. Now he can very well take up some general history of the language, with more confidence. H.C. Wyld's "historical study of the mother tongue" Henry Bradley's "the making of English" Otto Jespersen's "The growth and the structure of the English language", A.C. Bangh's "history of the English language" and O.F. Emerson's "the history of the English language" are all excellent books, each in its own way, though no one of them can be said to be complete or final in any sense. Along with these one may study Sweet's great work "New English grammar" and C.T. Onions' book on "Advanced English syntax" when one has got thus far in this study of the language, he will be in a position to decide for himself which branch of specialized study.

#### **Development of 19th Century Linguistics:-**

There were many significant developments in the nineteenth century which prepared the way for the growth of modern linguistics in the twentieth century. As a result of exposure to other linguistic traditions during the age of colonial expansion, there was a great deal of interest in historical and comparative study of languages. Scholars were keen to explore how languages were related to one another and formed distinct language groups or "families" e.g. the Indo-European. The discovery of the relationship between Sanskrit and the major languages of Europe (through the work of Sir William Jones) was the greatest impetus to historical studies of the European languages. The philologists Rask and Grimm initiated some of these studies in which there was a systematic comparison of word forms, and matching of a sound in one language with a sound in another led to an important formulation (known as Grimm's law) if there is found between two languages agreement in the form of indispensable words to such an extent that rules of letter changes can be discovered for passing from one to the other, then there is a basic relationship Norse and old English, and Grimm initiated studies in Germanic linguistics.

One of the most significant trends in linguistics towards the end of the nineteenth century was the emergence of the Neogrammarians. The school of linguists tried to give a scientific basis to historical linguistics, they were against theorizing and in favor of more data collection from actual languages. Their ideas had considerable influence on the American linguists such as Bloomfield and Sapir. The Neogrammarians gave importance to two areas of linguistics; phonetics and dialectology (Robins 1969; P. 180).

#### **The Study of the Sound System (20th Century):-**

The study of the sound system of languages by phoneticians and comparative linguists in the nineteenth century prepared the way for a descriptive approach to language, that is, for description of the structure of language. Many languages that had been hitherto described at the level of their sound system, and taking cue from the methods of Sanskrit phoneticians, attempts were made to distinguish the sound system from the alphabet system as for example, in the case of English. It was felt that the sound system of any language could be described if linguists had a standard notation for the transcription of speech sounds based on a classification of sounds into vowel and consonant types, each sound being characterized by its place and manner of articulation and given a particular symbol.

Among the several phoneticians who were concerned with spelling reform description of speech sounds acoustics and the devising of phonetic symbol, a prominent one was Henry Sweet. In his handbook of phonetics (1877) he distinguished between distinctive or contrastive sounds – a distinctive sound being contrasted and self against another sound being contrasted

and self against another sound is a phoneme (though sweet did not use this term which came into use later to define a minimal contrasted sound unit) subsequently, Daniel Jones used this distinction of English word in his outline of English phonetics (1914)

#### **The American Structuralist and Bloomfield:-**

Some of the most important influences on linguistics in the earlier part of the twentieth century came from fields such as anthropology and psychology. Anthropological studies of tribes such as the American Indians (or red Indians as they were called) revealed the existence of languages with elaborate sound systems which could be studied and described just as Latin and other European language had been described. This also focused attention on the structures of word formation and morphology in different languages in a lucid expository style, Bloomfield gives an explanation of morphology and process of word formation such as affixation and compounding distinguishing between analytic and synthetic compounds, drawing examples from the English as well as Sanskrit morphology. Bloomfield gave the concept of immediate constituents". Thus a sentence such as "poor john ran away" can be broken up into two immediate constituents "poor john" and 'ran away'. Each constituent can subsequently be analyzed further with 'poor john' consisting of 'poor and john' and 'ran away' consisting of 'ran' and 'away'. Constituents are grouped on the basis of substitutability e.g the whole of constituent poor John can be replaced by 'he' similarly the whole constituent 'ran away' can be replaced by 'went'. Thus a constituent is a slot in which similar constituents becomes clear when we use that 'poor' is closer to 'John' than it is to 'ran' and 'away' the first or immediate connection is between john than it is to ran and away. The first or immediate 'poor' and 'John' and the whole of this constituent poor john is the immediate constituent of the whole constituent 'ran away'.

#### **The Contribution of Saussure:-**

At the same time that structuralist approaches were being taken up in the USA, there were similar developments in Europe chief among there was the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand Desaussure.... Saussure's course in General linguistics (1916). Usherd in a revolution in linguistics and in the understanding of the structure of language. He made several important distinctions in the area of language study that set the foundation for the modern structural approach to language the distinction between language and substance (see chapter 3). Saussure also introduced the concept of language as a system of signs. This concept became important not only for the understanding of all human and social, structure as sign system.

Though we know have sociolinguistic evidence that parole too is socially restricted and that language is subject to change, de saussure's ideas on their dichotomy have inspired much of the later thinking in linguistics.

#### **The Prague School:-**

The Prague school consisted of a group of linguists who met regularly in the Zech capital Prague in the twenties and thirties, under the leadership of count trubetskoy, a prof. from Vienna, and the author of principles of phonology (1939). These linguists applied saussure's concepts of phonology other contrasts in phonemes occur according to the different positions occupied by them in words, whether they occur initially, medially, or finally. These phonologists also investigated the demarcation of syllable and the word boundaries.

#### **Conclusion:-**

In recent years there has also been a tremendous development in the areas of semantics, sociolinguistics and the analysis of discourse. Though many aspects of language are now understood, the voyage of discovery continues, building on the complex phenomena of human language. This is part of the enterprise of knowledge, i.e. 'know thyself', for knowing about language means knowing about ourselves.

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