

General Linguistics and its Subdivisions

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Annotation. The article deal with significant information about theoretical linguistics and its sub-fields. On the other hand, it covers definition and examples of each categories of general linguistics.

Key words: Theoretical linguistic, comparative linguistics, structure of words, competence, Diachronic linguistics, sub-field, and speech sounds, patterns, lexical semantics.

Linguistics is the study of languages, and as such, is of great importance to language teachers. Linguistics helps teachers convey the origins of words and languages, their historical applications, and their modern day relevance. Combined, this approach to teaching language helps students gain a better, more in-depth understanding of their assignments and work product expectations. Theoretical (or general) linguistics encompasses a number of sub-fields, such as the study of language structure (grammar) and meaning (semantics).

The study of grammar encompasses morphology (formation and alteration of words) and syntax (the rules that determine the way words combine into phrases and sentences). Also a part of this field are phonology, the study of sound systems and abstract sound units, and phonetics, which is concerned with the actual properties of speech sounds (phones), non-speech sounds, and how they are produced and perceived. Linguistics compares languages (comparative linguistics) and explores their histories, in order to find universal properties of language and to account for its development and origins (historical linguistics). Applied linguistics puts linguistic theories into practice in areas such as foreign language teaching, speech therapy, translation and speech pathology. Linguistic inquiry is pursued by a wide variety of specialists, who may not all be in harmonious agreement; as journalist Russ Rymer put it: "Linguistics is arguably the most hotly contested property in the academic realm. It is soaked with the blood of poets, theologians, philosophers, philologists, psychologists, biologists, anthropologists, and neurologists, along with whatever blood can be got out of grammarians [1]."

The central concern of theoretical linguistics is to characterize the nature of human language ability, or competence: to explain what it is that an individual knows when said to know a language; and to explain how it is that individuals come to know languages. All humans (setting aside extremely pathological cases) achieve competence in whatever language is

spoken (or signed, in the case of signed languages) around them when they are growing up, with apparently little need for conscious instruction. Non-humans do not. Therefore, there is some basic innate property of humans that causes them to be able to use language[2]. There is no discernible genetic process responsible for differences between languages: an individual will acquire whatever language(s) they are exposed to as a child, regardless of their parentage or ethnic origin. Linguistic structures are pairings of meaning and sound (or other externalization). Linguists may specialize in some subpart of the linguistic structure, which can be arranged in the following terms, from sound to meaning:

- Phonetics, the study of the physical aspects of sounds of human language;
- Phonology, the study of patterns of a language's sounds;
- Morphology, the study of the internal structure of words;
- Syntax, the study of how words combine to form grammatical sentences;
- Semantics, the study of the meaning of words (lexical semantics) and fixed word combinations (phraseology), and how these combine to form the meanings of sentences;
- Pragmatics, the study of how utterances are used (literally, figuratively, or otherwise) in communicative acts;
- Discourse analysis, the analysis of language use in texts (spoken, written or signed)

Many linguists would agree that the divisions overlap considerably, but the independent significance of each of these areas is not universally acknowledged. Regardless of any particular linguist's position, each area has core concepts that foster significant scholarly inquiry and research. Intersecting with these domains are fields arranged around the kind of external factors that are considered. For example. Stylistics, the study of linguistic factors that place a discourse in context. Developmental linguistics, the study of the development of linguistic ability in an individual, particularly the acquisition of language in childhood. Historical linguistics or Diachronic linguistics, the study of language change. Evolutionary linguistics, the study of the origin and subsequent development of language. Psycholinguistics, the study of the cognitive processes and representations underlying language use. Sociolinguistics, the study of social patterns of linguistic variability. Clinical linguistics, the application of linguistic theory to the area of Speech-Language Pathology. Neurolinguistics, the study of the brain networks that underlie grammar and communication[3].

A substantial part of linguistic investigation is into the nature of the differences among the languages of the world. The nature of variation is very important to an understanding of human linguistic ability in general: if human linguistic ability is very narrowly constrained by biological properties of the species, then languages must be very similar. If human linguistic ability is unconstrained, then languages might vary greatly. But there are different ways to interpret similarities among languages. For example, the Latin language spoken by the Romans developed into Spanish in Spain and Italian in Italy. Similarities between Spanish and Italian are in many cases due to both being descended from Latin. So in principle, if two languages share some property, this property might either be due to common inheritance or due to some property of the human language faculty. Of course, there is always the possibility of random chance being at the root of the similarity, such as

with Spanish ‘mucho’ and English ‘much’, which are not related historically in any way, though they mean essentially the same thing and sound similar.

Often, the possibility of common inheritance can be essentially ruled out. Given the fact that learning language comes quite easily to humans, it can be assumed that languages have been spoken at least as long as there have been biologically modern humans, probably at least fifty thousand years. Independent measures of language change (for example, comparing the language of ancient texts to the daughter languages spoken today) suggest that change is rapid enough to make it impossible to reconstruct a language that was spoken so long ago; as a consequence of this, common features of languages spoken in different parts of the world are not normally taken as evidence for common ancestry. Even more striking, there are documented cases of sign languages being developed in communities of congenitally deaf people who could not have been exposed to spoken language. The properties of these sign languages have been shown to conform generally to many of the properties of spoken languages, strengthening the hypothesis that those properties are not due to common ancestry but to more general characteristics of the way languages are learned.

Loosely speaking, the collection of properties, which all languages share, can be referred to as “universal grammar” (or UG), the characteristics of which is a much debated topic. Linguists and non-linguists also use this term in several different ways. Universal properties of language may be partly due to universal aspects of human experience; for example, all humans experience water, and all human languages have a word for water. Nonetheless, UG seeks to define those structures which are necessarily a part of all human language because of the de facto structure of the human mind—so similarities in human language which can be attributed to having arisen out of similarity of experience does not provide information for answering the more difficult questions about UG. Clearly, experience is part of the process by which individuals learn languages; but experience by itself is not enough, since animals raised around people learn extremely little human language, if any at all. A more interesting example is this: suppose that all human languages distinguish nouns from verbs (this is generally believed to be true)[4]. This would require a more sophisticated explanation, since nouns and verbs do not exist in the world, apart from languages that make use of them. In general, a property of UG could be due to general properties of human cognition, or due to some property of human cognition that is specific to language. Too little is understood about human cognition in general to allow a meaningful distinction to be made. As a result, generalizations are often stated in theoretical linguistics without a stand being taken on whether the generalization could have some bearing on other aspects of cognition.

In conclusion it should be noted that the use of linguistics in education is continuing to grow, and is often cross-disciplinary in nature. Not only is it utilized by language instructors, it is also used in early childhood development, psychology and anthropology education, as well. Linguistics is not only the study of language, but also includes the evolution and historical context of language, speech and memory development. It includes the structure and meaning of speech, and of written languages as well as an understanding of the context in which certain words are used. When teaching a foreign language, linguistics is important to a language teacher in that providing historical context to word origins can help students better comprehend the language. This is especially important when it comes to comprehending the differences among conversational speech, formal speech, and abstract rules about word usage in different cultures. This can actually overlap into regional dialects within the same

country.

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