Introduction to Linguistics 2 (CL1.102)

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Term Paper

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Introduction

Language as an area of study has been divided for the sake of convenience into several subfields – phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics and so on. A convenient distinction is usually made between fields studying the abstract, formal nature of language, and those studying its interaction with the physical context. The latter fields never consider utterances in isolation – relations between utterances and the effect of the surrounding context on them (and vice versa) are studied.

This term paper opens with a consideration of the former set of disciplines. We then consider the relationship between language and surroundings in its most general form. Finally, we discuss in greater detail the second group of subfields, and the various ways language affects and is affected by the environment.

Structures of Language

There are numerous sub-disciplines of linguistics that focus on the abstract and formal side of languages – they study linguistic units in isolation, both socially and physically. These include phonology, morphology and syntax.
These areas of study form a natural hierarchy, where each level studies individually the components of higher levels. For example, morphology considers only words and their components, while syntax is the study of how words come together to form complete sentences.

The formalism in these fields comes from the structures they identify in the usage of the components they study. Each discipline has some associated abstract structure that it uses to organise its study.

However, they are not independent or isolated from each other – all the levels interact with each other in complex ways.

Phonology

Phonology consists of the study of sounds and how they interact with each other to create bigger utterances. Phonologists study the features of sounds – their place of articulation, manner of articulation, voicing, tone etc. – and the ways they are produced by the human vocal tract. A closely related area of study, phonetics, considers the sound systems of individual languages.

The structures that sounds (phones) are organised into are syllables, whose composition and classification form a big part of phonology and phonetics.

Morphology

Morphology comprises the study of language's smallest units of meaning – morphemes – and their interaction to form words. Put differently, the composition and construction of words is of interest to morphologists.

Being in the middle of hierarchy, morphology has two closely allied fields – morphophonology and morphosyntax:

- Morphophonology is the study of how sounds make up morphemes and how their pronunciation is affected in the wider context of words. The interaction of phonemes at morpheme boundaries, and the specific phonetic composition of morphemes come under this field.
- Morphosyntax, similarly, is the study of how words interact with each other in the wider context of a sentence. Grammatical agreement is a prominent topic in this area of study, as it is deeply involved with the syntactic relations between words, and affects their morphology.

Words themselves are the structures that morphology is concerned with – they are studied in terms of their composition from morphemes.

Syntax

Syntax, in a broad sense, is the study of the largest unit of language short of discourse, *i.e.*, the sentence. This field is concerned with how words make up sentences.

The structures that syntax involves are intended to describe sentences, for which purpose there exist many formalisms. Two of the more common ones are dependency grammar and constituency grammar.

However, the line between syntax and morphology is very frequently blurred or nonexistent – the sheer variety in language organisations makes for a very loose distinction between "words" and "sentences". In the study of languages in which single words can make complete and intricate sentences, the distinction is almost meaningless. Linguistic typology studies these characteristics of languages, classifying them as isolating, analytic, fusional, polysynthetic or agglutinating. For example, Hindi and English are analytic, as grammatical functions are

carried out mainly by words (`kAraka cihna` and prepositions respectively), while Malayalam and Telugu are more polysynthetic in nature.

For example, in Hindi, the phrase `skUla meM` ("in school") is a locative, and the locative case is expressed by the particle (postposition) `meM`. On the other hand, a single Malayalam word like `ceVyyAnulYlYawokkeV` can need a whole phrase to be expressed in English – "all that is to be done".

Conceptual System

The disciplines described in the preceding section are entirely independent of language's use in society. They consider language in a physical and social vacuum, and are only concerned with its internal composition and "correctness". While not completely clear-cut or unambiguous, these areas are more black-and-white than the others, which consider the relations among utterances on the one hand, and between utterances and the environment, on the other.

Language at its core is a conceptual system – it is a way to describe what we see around us and our thought processes. A prerequisite to expressing anything using language is to categorise and classify the world around us and its objects, as well as our own thoughts. Thus, its relation to these aspects cannot be ignored in a complete scientific study.

Language and Thought

The question of the influence of language on thought has been widely debated. Two dominant schools of thought exist – relativism and innateness.

Relativism, in its strongest form, is the notion that language completely restricts one's perceptions and worldview. One's thought processes are completely "imprisoned" by one's language. This claim, however, is discredited today in view of several counterpoints (such as the possibility of translation, and the mutability of a person's semantic equipment throughout their life).

Innateness, on the other hand, rejects relativism in its claim that all language human languages share a basic conceptual framework, which is "built into" human brains from birth. It is in direct opposition to the *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, postulated by relativists.

Language and Environment

The utterances and physical context surrounding any given utterance have an enormous effect on it. This is the aspect of language captured by the disciplines of semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis – how language encodes or grammaticalises context, and sometimes even changes it.

It is at this point in linguistic study that the assumption of a "vacuum", maintained in the study of phonology, morphology and syntax, must be discarded.

Other participants besides the abstraction of language itself enter into the picture – the speaker, the addressee, the referent, and so on – which were irrelevant for the most part until this point.

Communicative situations are sometimes analysed into essential components; one such classification[1] breaks them into the originator (the speaker or writer), the receiver (the addressee or reader), the channel (audio or visual), the subject matter (the meaning or the intent) and the message itself (the utterance). Of these, only the last is studied by the abstract side of linguistics – only the utterance, independent of who is saying it, whom it is addressed to, and what it means, has been under consideration. In a manner of speaking, "the language, the whole language, and nothing but the language".

Semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis aim to bring into view the originator, the receiver and the subject matter as well; they go deeper into the abstraction that is "language", no longer considering the other essential aspects of communication as black boxes. They talk about language in a socially and physically populated environment – a system in which language is only one part that must (and does) interact with others.

Language beyond Structures

Keeping all this in mind, we now begin to consider the principles of language use – the components of communication superimposed on the structures of language studied by phonology, morphology and syntax.

We will first discuss a general notion – the distinction between "knowing a language" and "knowing *how to speak* a language". Thereafter, we will consider how utterances interact among themselves and with the surroundings in a communicative situation, and the assumptions that participants in a discourse share.

Competence vs Performance

This is the fundamental dichotomy on the basis of which the fields of linguistics are divided into those that study the abstractions of language and those that study the interactions of language. It was first made in these terms by Chomsky – he defined linguistic competence as the mental knowledge a speaker of a language has, as opposed to linguistic performance or the actual use of language in concrete situations.

This distinction is similar to de Saussure's line between *langue* (the theoretical and abstract system making up language) and *parole* (the actual set of utterances produced under this system)[2]. However, the overlap is not perfect; de Saussure's

[1] Leech, Geoffrey. *Semantics: The study of meaning.* 2nd ed., Penguin Books, 1981.

[2] Lyons, John, and Lyons John. *Linguistic semantics: An introduction.* Cambridge University Press, 1995.

parole only includes production of language, and not its comprehension, while Chomsky's linguistic performance encompasses both.

For example, linguistic competence is knowing how to frame the imperative sentence `pAnI leke Ao` or `veVlYlYaM koNtuvarU` ("bring water"); but linguistic performance is knowing that this can be considered rude and it is better to say `jZarA pAnI leke Aoge?` or `oVnnu veVlYlYaM koNtuvarumo?` ("would/could you just bring water?").

This distinction encapsulates the divide between phonology, morphology and syntax on the one hand, and semantics, pragmatics and discourse on the other. The former set of disciplines focusses on abstracting and describing linguistic competence, while the latter concerns itself with concrete performance in communicative situations. Since linguistic performance merely superimposes additional (social or environmental) dimensions on isolated utterances, it is entirely dependent on competence; however, despite this inclusion, these new dimensions add an entirely new layer of complexity to the study of competence. For instance, in order to say `oVnnu veVlYlYaM koNtuvarumo?`, obviously one must first know the grammatical constructions and the phonological components that make up the utterance; what is less clear is the need to know that this is more polite than `veVlYlYaM koNtuvarU`, which is what makes all the difference.

There is still a close relation between the two sides – neither is irrelevant to the study of the other. Distinctions and classifications made in semantics and pragmatics often clearly mirror corresponding divisions in morphology or syntax.

Sense Relations

Sense relations are non-situational – one might say asynchronous – relations among utterances. They are connections between the meanings of words or sentences, independent of their immediate context.

We will consider two types of sense relations – those between words, and those between sentences.

- The meanings of words are related in several ways. Two words can be
  - homonyms (having the same pronunciation and unrelated meaning), like `diyA` ("gave") and `diyA` ("lamp") in Hindi, or `kawwi` ("burned") and `kawwi` ("knife") in Malayalam;
  - a polysemous pair (having the same pronunciation and related meanings), like `calA` ("ran") and `calA` ("make it run!") in Hindi, or `maNN` ("soil") and `maNN` ("earth") in Malayalam;
  - near-synonyms (synonymous in some contexts but not others), like `hqxaya` and `mana` ("heart") in Hindi, or `xinaM` and `xivasaM` ("day") in Malayalam[3];

[3]For example, one can say `merA mana kara rahA hE` ("I feel like") but not `merA hqxaya kara raha hE`; or one can say `svAwanwryaxinaM` ("Independence Day") but not `swAwanwryaxivasaM`.

  - hyponyms (one having a narrower meaning than the other), like `jAnavara` ("animal") and `kuttA` ("dog") in Hindi, or `puswakaM` ("book") and `noval` ("novel") in Malayalam;
  - meronyms (one referring to a part of another), like `hAWa` ("hand") and `uZgalI` ("finger") in Hindi, or `saMsWAna` ("state") and `jillA` ("district") in Malayalam;
  - antonyms (having opposite meanings), like `acCA` ("good") and `burA` ("bad") in Hindi, or `valiya` ("big") and `cerYiya` ("small") in Malayalam;
  - reverses (indicating opposite directions or movements), like `Upara` ("up") and `nIce` ("down") in Hindi, or `itaM` ("left") and `valaM` ("right") in Malayalam; or
  - converses (indicating the same relation from a different perspective), like `aXyApaka` ("teacher") and `vixyArWI` ("student") in Hindi, or `BArya` ("wife") and `BarwwAv` ("husband") in Malayalam.
- Sentences, too, can have their meanings connected in many ways. Two sentences may exhibit
  - synonymy (having the same meaning), like `usakA pZona AyA WA` ("his phone (call) had come") and `usane pZona kiyA WA` ("he had phoned (called)"), or `FAn kalYlYaM parYaFu` ("I lied") and `kalYlYaM parYaFaw FAnA` ("It is I who lied");
  - entailment (one requiring the other), like `hamane gAdI calAI` ("We drove the car") and `gAdI calI` ("The car ran"), or `avan noval vAyiccu` ("He read a novel") and `avan puswakaM vAyiccu` ("He read a book") [here the hyponymy is a source of entailment];
  - contradiction (cannot be true at the same time), like `mEM hinxI bolawA hUZ` ("I speak Hindi") and `muJe hinxi nahIM AwI` ("I don't know Hindi"), or `avanrYeV kuttikalYumAyi saMsAriccu` ("(I) spoke to his children") and `avanu kuttikalY illa` ("He has no children"); or
  - presupposition (one assumes the other), like `mere pawi Gara calAwe hEM` ("My husband runs the house") and `merI SAxI huI hE` ("I am married"), or `avalYkk ippolYYuM A jOli uNt` ("She still has that job") and `avalYkk A jOli uNtAyirunnu` ("She had/used to have that job").

    The distinction between entailment and presupposition is not entirely unambiguous, but a common rule of thumb is that presupposition is more about real-world facts that need to be assumed, while entailment is more dependent on actual logical consequence.

  Further, individual sentences can be classified as
  - anomalies (cannot be true; presuppose a contradiction), like `ve dopahara nO baje Ae` ("They came at nine o'clock in the afternoon") or `nI Pabruvari muppawwi-oVnnAnwi vannu` ("You came on February thirty-first"); or
  - tautologies (trivially true), like `agara mEM use xeKUZgA wo vaha xiKa jAegA` ("If I see him, he will be seen") or `ivan kalyANaM`

kalYYikkAwwa avivAhiwanA (“He is an unmarried bachelor”).

These relations are, for the most part, restricted to the word and sentence level – they do not concern relations between meanings of sentences in a discourse.

Context and Reference

The context of a discourse is knowledge of the physical and social world, the socio-psychological factors and the time and place that the utterance occurs in[4]. The participants share this knowledge and it enables them to interpret the utterances they hear. It is of three types:

- situational context, which relies on the participants' perception of the immediate physical context in which the utterance occurs (for example, gestures);
- background knowledge context, which is the participants' knowledge of the world in general and about each other (for example, culture or personal history); and
- co-textual context, which is the participants' memory of a previous utterance.

Reference is the process whereby context is grammaticalised, or incorporated into linguistic utterances. It is, in a sense, the “footprint” of the context on language. This occurs in three main ways: deixis (for situational context), exophora (for background knowledge context) and endophora (for co-textual context).

Deixis is the phenomenon of a word having a different referent depending on its context. It can be spatial, temporal or personal:

- spatial deixis points to a location: iXara (“here”) and uXara (“there”) in Hindi, iviteV (“here”) and affott (“towards there”) in Malayalam;
- temporal dexis to a time: Aja (“today”) and agale haPZawe (“next week”) in Hindi, ann (“that day”) and nAlYeV (“tomorrow”) in Malayalam; and
- personal deixis to a person: wuma (“you”) and hama (“we”) in Hindi, ivan (“he”, prox.) and FAn (“I”) in Malayalam.

Their referents may be identified by situational context (pointing or gesturing) or by co-textual context (previous mention in the discourse).

Exophora is the referral to an entity for the first time in a conversation or a discourse.

Endophora is the referral to an entity which is also mentioned in the same discourse; typically it is carried out by personal pronouns and demonstrative pronouns, adjectives or adverbs. It is of two types. Anaphora refers to what has already been mentioned; for example, in Hindi,
wumhAre pApA kahAZ hEM? ve xukAna gaye hEM (“Where is your father? **He** has gone to the shop.”)

[4]Cutting, Joan. *Pragmatics and discourse: A resource book for students.* Routledge, 2005.

and in Malayalam,
`ammayuM FAnuM vannu, FaffalYuteV vaNtiyuNt` ("Mother and I came, **we** have a car.")

Cataphora, on the other hand, refers to what is yet to be mentioned; for example, in Hindi,
`mEM usakI bAwa kara rahA WA jo A cukA hE` ("I was talking about **him** who has already come.")

and in Malayalam,
`nI iffott vannirunnu, eVnrYeV katayilekk` ("You came **here**, to my shop.")

The Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle essentially states that all participants in a discourse or conversation share some assumptions about each other's utterances. There are guidelines that all participants (generally) adhere to while making utterances, in view of this principle – these guidelines are called maxims. Four of them were laid down by Grice as follows:

- the maxim of quantity: say exactly what is necessary and no more.
- the maxim of quality: be truthful and accurate.
- the maxim of relation: be relevant.
- the maxim of manner: be brief and concise.

Breaking these maxims (unintentionally) results in poorly structured and incoherent conversation – this is called *violating* the maxims. On the other hand, *flouting* the maxims refers to an intentional infraction of one or more maxims; ordinarily, this is done with a specific purpose in mind, like humour or sarcasm.

Face and Politeness Strategies

Face is the concept of a person's self-esteem or estimation of their own position in the conversation. Many linguistic mechanisms are in place in natural languages for participants to "save face" or to avoid "losing face" – these include polite or respectful modes of address (including pronouns and titles) or roundabout constructions. Not making use of such mechanisms can be construed as a face-threatening act or FTA.

Pronouns to indicate respect tend to be more stratified in Indian languages than in English – for example, Hindi has three (`wU`, informal singular; `wuma`, informal singular or plural; and `Apa`, formal singular or plural) and Malayalam has four (`wAn`, very informal singular; `nI`, informal singular; `niffalY`, informal plural or formal singular or plural; and `tAfkalY`, very formal singular or plural).
Hindi titles to indicate respect range from `bhEyA` ("elder brother") and `mAjI` ("mother") to `hujZUra`, `janAba`, `mAlika` and `sAhiba` (all having a meaning roughly similar to "master"). In Malayalam, too, family relations like `cecI`

(“elder sister”) and amma (“mother”) are used, along with more polite titles like mAR (“master”), sArY (“sir”) and medaM (“madam”).
There are other ways to encode politeness in these languages as well:

- In Malayalam, frequently the pronoun is not used at all. For instance, one might say to one’s mother, ammayuteV kaNNata eVviteV (“where are Mother’s glasses?”) rather than use niffalY.
- In Hindi/Urdu, the placeholder noun phrase taSrIPZa (roughly translated as “self”) can be used. For instance, instead of Aiye or paXAriye (“come”), one might say taSrIPZa lAiye (“bring your self”).

There are two types of “face”; positive face, or the need to be accepted and liked; and negative face, or the need for one’s personal space.

Face is the basis of many politeness strategies employed in day-to-day conversation. Negative politeness strategies, which aim to protect the addressee’s negative face, presume to increase the distance between the participants, and to give the addressee more options instead of making a direct request or order. Other ways are to hedge, using phrases like “I think”, or formulating the utterance as a question rather than an order. Positive politeness strategies make appeals to solidarity or common ground or making use of slang.

These are all common in Indian languages as much as in English. For example, in Hindi, one might say jZarA xaravAjZA banxa karoge? (“would you just close the door?”) instead of the less polite xaravAjZA banxa karo (“close the door”); or in Malayalam, A upp oVnn warAmO? (“could you just give me that salt?”) instead of A upp warU (“give that salt”); where jZara and oVnn (roughly translatable as “just”) are both ways to soften the request, along with expressing it as a question.

Speech Acts

Speech acts are actions that a speaker performs simply by making an utterance. Typically they refer to apologies, requests, invitations, etc. Austin classified them as “performatives” and gave conditions for them to be happy or “felicitous”. They contrast, in this classification, with “constantives”, which describe an action independent of the utterance itself.

A common example of a performative in English is *You are now man and wife.*, by the very uttering of which a couple is married. Analogously, in Hindi, we have, for instance, meri gujZAriSa hE ki Apa mere Gara Ao (“it is my request that/I request you to come home”); and in Malayalam, for example, FAn mApp vAffunnu (“I am seeking forgiveness”).

Austin also classified the effects (“forces”) of utterances into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. Locutionary force is the literal, unadorned reference of the utterance, and illocutionary force is the action intended by the speaker (whether the utterance is perfomative or constantive). Perlocutionary

force, however, is not very linguistic in nature – it refers to the psychological or physical effect the utterance actually has on the addressee.

For example, consider the sentences `tUne Ane kA vAxA kiyA WA` and `nI varumeVnn vAkk wannirunnu` ("You had promised to come"). Their locutionary force is a direct, assertive statement about a past action or utterance of the addressee – that they had made a promise to come. On the contrary, their illocutionary force is the actual act of coming which the speaker is trying to cause the addressee to do. Their perlocutionary force is (possibly) making the addressee feel guilty enough to come, or at least to suitably justify not coming.

Further, most utterances have a literal meaning (direct speech acts) as well as a non-literal meaning (indirect speech acts). The literal meaning is typically secondary, as in the common use of an interrogative construction to express a request (as a politeness strategy, seen above).

Conclusion

We have seen in some detail the various aspects of language beyond the formal and abstract structures that make up its skeleton. Language does not exist in a vacuum – it is, by its very nature, a communicative tool, and to study it without a consideration of its social and contextual aspects cannot give one a complete picture.

We have discussed the fundamental distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance. We then considered the relations of utterances among themselves, namely sense relations between pairs of words and sentences. We then saw the effect of context on language and the basic assumptions that users of language must adhere to, followed by the various ways language is used to mitigate face-threatening acts. The union of linguistic and social functions, speech acts, was then discussed.

It is clear at this point that the ability to use a language is not restricted to mere abstract knowledge of its structures and formalisms – the entire picture is provided only by a detailed consideration of the interaction of language with its social and physical environment.

References

The following works were the source of information for this term paper, but have not been quoted directly:
1. Leech, Geoffrey. *Semantics: The study of meaning.* 2nd ed., Penguin Books, 1981.
2. Lyons, John, and Lyons John. *Linguistic semantics: An introduction.* Cambridge University Press, 1995.
3. Cutting, Joan. *Pragmatics and discourse: A resource book for students.*

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