



ENG423A: Current Issues in Linguistics

THE FIELD OF LINGUISTICS II

Language study across disciplines



Language is not a monolithic entity.



Complexity inhering in language makes it an object of interest for many disciplines, each studying language in their own ways.



Philosophers, anthropologists, historians, literary critics, philologists, sociologists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists have taken interest in language as an object of study.



In the last hundred years, and even earlier, Linguistics has enriched itself by borrowing insights from these fields through several hyphenated interdisciplinary pursuits.

Study of Language within Linguistics

Structure of language: Phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, semantics.

Linguistics gives a *formal theory of syntax* grounded in **computer science** and *semantics* grounded in **formal logic**)

Meaning-making in language: *Pragmatics* - approaches to meaning-making taking into account the context of utterance rooted in **philosophy**.

Cognitive underpinnings of language: investigations of backstage cognition driving language behaviour rooted in **cognitive science, psychology**.

Social context of language: how social structure shapes language and language in turn shapes society – an approach grounded in **sociology**.

Study of Language within Linguistics

Historical evolution of languages: Comparative Philology grounded in **philology**, a historical study of language

Origin of language in the species: Paeleolinguistics also called Phylogenesis (**Evolutionary Biology**)

Development of language in an individual: Language acquisition also called ontogenesis (**Cognitive Science, Developmental Psychology**)

Development of language in a culture: Anthropological linguistics - cultural evolution of language (**Anthropology**)

Neural architecture of language: Neurolinguistics (**Neurobiology**)

Intrinsic multi-disciplinarity and hyphenated subfields such as Psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, neurolinguistics etc.

Major questions asked

Faculty of language: what is special about it?

How language is acquired by humans

How language evolved in the species

Languages of the world or the universal core?

Why the world looks different in other languages

Why nature and nurture won't go away

How words mean . . . etc.

An empirical science

Different sources of data:

1. Speaker judgments about grammaticality or semanticity of linguistic expressions, e.g.,
Colourless green ideas sleep furiously

2. Observational data from oral or transcribed corpora of how people use language

Everyday texts (literary texts included)

3. Experimental data:

- Behavioural experiments – reaction time, eye-tracking etc.
- Neural patterns – EEG (electroencephalogram) records electric activity in the brain at work with language; (f)MRI captures areas of activation in the neural cortex.
- Atypical processing of language

Generative Linguistics

What is linguistic knowledge?

How does this knowledge arise in the mind?

What is the universal core of linguistic knowledge?

What are its language specific realizations?

How did the linguistic knowledge arise in the species?

Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive underpinnings of language structure and use

All cognition is meaning-making. Linguistic cognition is linguistically mediated meaning-making

A notion like time is linguistically expressed through tense

How is time conceptualized?

It is conceptualized in terms of a flow from past to present to future or the opposite?

If different languages conceptualize time differently, then does the conceptualization of time in a language also affect how people think about time?

Sociolinguistics

Variability: social conditioning of language

Linguistic behaviour correlates significantly with the variables that constitute a part of our social lives

Parameters of variation: age, gender, race, class, caste and so on.

Which language you speak, when, where and why

Which variety of your language you speak, when, where and why

Languages and language varieties are socially conditioned and socially evaluated.

Psycholinguistics

Experimentation into what linguistic behaviour says about the human cognitive potential.

Evidentiality

Hindi and Kashmiri differ in many ways – one of these is evidentiality.

The manner of speaking about events.

Making a distinction between the actual and probable

Experimental studies can be conducted to see if such distinction exists in the processing of events by Hindi and Kashmiri speakers

And how about the bilingual mind?

Neurolinguistics

Brain and language

Which areas of the brain specialize in language.

Which areas of the cortex are involved in what linguistic activities – comprehension, production, reading etc.

Which areas of the brain are involved in which aspects of language – grammar, phonology etc.



Paeleolinguistics

Evolution of language

Same principles that govern evolution of species is general or is something else happening here?

A mutation that enhanced survival possibilities

Language as an adaptation?

Language Acquisition

How do humans acquire language?

Place of language acquisition in general cognitive development of humans

Stages of acquisition

Critical period hypothesis

Can artificial agents acquire language?

Anthropological linguistics

How linguistic cultures evolve and sometimes die

Language endangerment and documentation

Andamanese - a stark example



There are at least two distinct families of Andamanese languages, the **Great Andamanese** and **Ongan**, as well as **Sentinelese**, which is at present unclassifiable.



Great Andamanese: Spoken by the Great Andamanese people



Aka-Jeru had 36 speakers in 1997 who were bilingual in Hindi, listed in Ethnologue as having no speakers today. Others include Jarawa with 250 speakers in 2006, Akar-Bale and Aka-Bea, Oko-Juwoi, Aka-Kole, and some others now extinct.



Ongan: Two languages spoken by 300 people, mostly monolingual.



Sentinelese: likely to have at least 250 speakers but the exact population of the Sentinelese people is unknown.

The Andamanese languages

Salvaging dying languages

Need for documentation in contexts where languages are facing extinction.

Preserving a linguistic and cultural heritage that might otherwise simply die away.

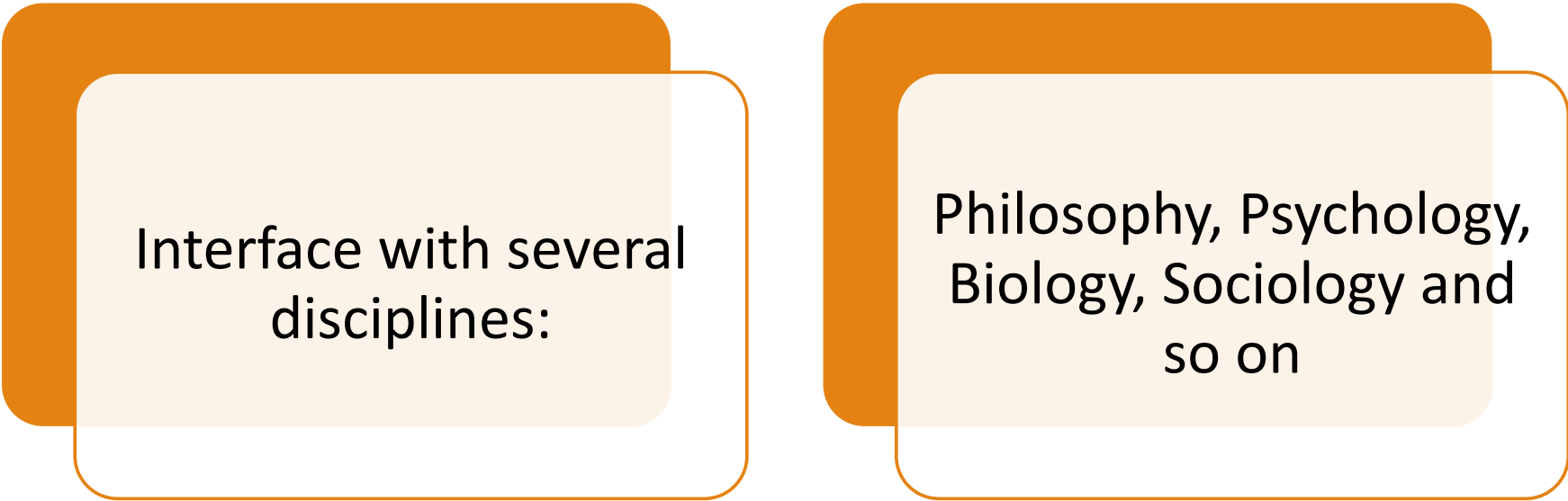
Andamanese language family is just an example.

Hundreds of languages in the Indian subcontinent are endangered.

And thousands across the world!

Salvage linguistics – a concern for dying languages and cultures

Multidisciplinarity at the Core



Interface with several
disciplines:

Philosophy, Psychology,
Biology, Sociology and
so on