



ENG423A: Current Issues in Linguistics

HISTORY OF LINGUISTIC THOUGHT

Linguistic Historiography

Developments in any field - closely related to the historical and cultural contexts in which they take place. True of Linguistics as much as any other field.

Historiography is the study of the methods and approaches employed by historians in their field. By extension, the term also refers to how the historical account of a particular discipline is constructed by its historians.

The historiography of a specific discipline deals with how its practitioners have constructed its history using particular sources or approaches, often reflecting the loyalties of the practitioners themselves.

History of linguistic thought: Multiple histories constructed from various vantage points.

A reading

Campbell, Lyle. 2003. The History of Linguistics. In Aronoff, Mark and Janie Rees-Miller (eds.) The Handbook of Linguistics. Blackwell.

Linguistic traditions

Old Babylonian tradition:

Sumerian, the language of the religious and legal texts, was being gradually replaced by Akkadian.

Linguistics took over so that Sumerian could be taught and the religious and legal texts would continue to be read.

Linguistic activity resulting in inventories of Sumerian words with Akkadian equivalents – bilingual dictionaries of some kind.

Linguistic traditions

The Greco-Roman tradition:

Grammar, Logic and Rhetorics – three pillars of learning comprising the scholastic trivium

Grammatika – the art of writing

Aesthetic excellence as enshrined in the Greek literary classics, Homer's Illiad and Odyssey

Roman tradition based largely on the Greek themes

Linguistic traditions

The Arabic tradition:

Study of grammar derived its impetus from the need to establish Arabic, the language of the holy text, as sacred and immutable.

Changes introduced by the spoken language in 8th century stimulated the development of the Arabic grammatical tradition.

The Hebrew tradition:

Began with the concern for establishing the correct Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

The Indian Tradition

The Sanskrit language was seen as the pathway to revelation as embodied in the Vedas.

1) Preserving the tradition – maintain, understand and transmit the vast body of culturally significant body of knowledge - the Vedas.

2) Knowledge through verbal testimony - word the ultimate source of all that can be known; perception/inference were viewed as secondary.

Prescriptivism

Prescriptivism in India, Greece and other ancient civilisations

Born out of adherence to certain notions of purism associated with language

Ordinary language of people regarded as a source of corruption

The linguist's task was to protect language from such corruption.

Auxiliary disciplines

The *Vedangas*

Limbs of the Vedas: six auxiliary disciplines in the Vedic civilization

Vyākaraṇa (Grammar: *Pāṇini*)

Śikṣa (Phonetics: *Gargeya*)

Nirukta (Etymology: *Yaska*)

Chhanda (Metrics: *Pingala*)

Kalpa (Ritualistics), and

Jyotiṣa (Astrology)

Four of the six bodies of knowledge are devoted to language.

Prescriptivism

Followed by nearly 2500 years of a prescriptive tradition.

Grammar is what you ought to speak.

Prescriptivism born out of a resistance to change

Successors to this tradition – interpretation and reinterpretation of early linguistic texts

Vyākaraṇa: Paṇini

The *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the eight chaptered, “the greatest monument of human intelligence” (Leonard Bloomfield)

Primary focus: Description of Sanskrit in terms of rules which capture the word formation processes in the language

- Morphology: derivational and inflectional process
- Phonology: sandhi rules
- Syntax – compounding (samaasa) and karaka relations
mahatma > mahaan +aatma
visheshana + visheshya

Karakas

Nominal paradigms of verb argument relations – a syntactic-semantic-pragmatic system

kartr, karma, karana, sampradhana (recipient), apadana (the fixed point from which the separation takes place – peD se phal gira, aankh se aansoo tapka)), adhikarana (location), sambodhana (vocative – an underlying ‘you’) shasthi – not a karaka relation

Contd. . .

Not undifferentiated classes – too much of pragmatics (world knowledge)

Meaning – linguistic knowledge and contextual knowledge.

A fundamental tenet of modern linguistics: Grammatical description must separate the two; sentence as the unit of analysis is decontextualised

Panini saw this but could not break free of the context completely.

Contd...

Adhikarana – not undifferentiated:

Abhivyapaka – all comprehensive or wholistic – the oil is in the seed.

aupashlesika – proximity – the house is at the river

vaishayika – partial occupation – the water is in the glass

Pragmatic knowledge being used in this differentiation.

Meaning-making

Later scholars of language speak of principles regulating interpretation.

Mimamsa: interpretation – vakya shastra

Akanksha - expectancy

Yogyata – consistency, compatibility

Aasatti – contiguity, proximity (also sanadhi)

Tatparya – intentionality (implicit also in Panini)

Principles of interpretation

A word is unable to convey a complete sense in the absence of another word.

Akanksha or Expectancy is mutual – verb expects nominals, a nominal also expects the verb

Yogyata – pragmatic compatibility

Alankarikas – incompatibility does not prevent verbal comprehension.

Three kinds of meaning: avidha, lakshana and vyanjana

Lakshana comes from yogyata violation

Prescriptive distinctions

Saadhu vs. asaadhu words - authority of grammar

Mleccha prayoga – those outside the limits of Aryavarta

Apashabda: dialectal variants

Dushta shabda: deviant usage caused by physical infirmity or ignorance

Some leading ideas in Panini

1. Lexical item centredness of grammar: The Karaka relations are defined as relations between the verb and nominal entities.
2. Separation of linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge – need felt but never achieved completely.
3. Pragmatic context brought in through (a) the differentiated karakas, and (b) importance of speaker intentionality

Some leading ideas in Panini

4. Notion of underlying representations which revolutionized modern linguistics is very much present in Panini

Vigraha in samasa:

raaj+indra > raajendra

Sandhi rules in word formation:

aham ~ ahanta ~ ahankar

7. Panini's theory of morphological analysis is as advanced as any equivalent Western theory before the mid-20th century.

At the level of the meta-theory

- 1) Empirical coverage – exhaustiveness (description is complete)
- 2) Internal consistency – an accomplishment given the sheer volume of the work and considering it was an oral tradition
- 3) Economy – redundancy free

Testing grounds for linguistic theory even today.