



ENG423A: Current Issues in Linguistics

THE FIELD OF LINGUISTICS I

Language is. . .

A pairing of forms and meanings

The faculty of mind to use symbols

The set of rules that makes up these symbol systems

The set of expressions that can be generated using those rules.

Language is. . .

A species-specific ability to use a symbolic system which evolved naturally and is acquired spontaneously by the human child...



Language and Cognition



Language and Cognition relationship is a complex and multi-layered one.



a) Language: an **object** of cognition
like mathematics or music

Study the internal structure of the linguistic system



b) Language: a **vehicle** of cognition
like gestures

Study how the internal structure of language is deployed for various purposes



c) Language: a **modality** of cognition
like vision or navigation

Study the conceptual underpinnings of the language modality



Three broad orientations to the study of language born out of how the relationship between language and cognition is construed.

Formal Linguistics

Language: an **object** of cognition like mathematics or music

- Study the internal structure of the linguistic system
- Lists and Rules: declarative and procedural components
- Focuses primarily on the universal and language specific **structural properties** of language and languages
- **Universal Grammar and its language-specific realizations**



Formal Linguistics

Prominent among these: Contemporary Generative Linguistics [Noam Chomsky].

Most linguistics in the Indian Linguistic Tradition [Panini] has been of this variety even when it does not make an explicit claim about language as an object of cognition.

Schools of linguistics that explore the historical evolution of languages focus entirely on the **structural properties** of the parent languages and their descendants.

Functional Linguistics

Language: a **vehicle** of cognition like gestures

- Study how the internal structure of language is used for various purposes
- Investigates the **correspondences between language structure and function**
- E.g., Interrogation and interrogative structures
- Interrogative function
- Several schools of functional linguistics but none have gained a global acceptability. E.g., British functionalists [Halliday]
- Interesting applications in language pedagogy
- **A grammar of language functions**



How interrogation works in English

IN-Question(e.g. What are you doing?) – Eliciting contentive information.

YN-Question (e.g. Are you coming?) – Eliciting affirmative or negative information.

TAG-Question (e.g. You are coming, aren't you?) – Eliciting a confirmatory response.

RH-Question (e.g. Who hasn't heard of Mahatma Gandhi?) – a rhetorical device.

ECH-Question (e.g. You are going to ask whom for what?) – a plea for repeating the response.

IND-Question (e.g. I wondered whether he would accompany me.) – asking an indirect question.

AL-Question (e.g. Would you accompany me or you won't?) – presenting alternative responses.

Cognitive Linguistics

Language: a **modality** of cognition like vision or navigation

- investigates the relationship that natural language bears to human cognition.
- Examines various constructs in linguistic theory from a cognitivist perspective in an attempt to explore the intersection between the linguistic and conceptual systems.
- The objective is to explore and try and understand the **conceptual underpinnings of language**.
- **A grammar of the conceptual system**





Language reflects patterns of thought.



Therefore, to study language from this perspective is to study patterns of **conceptualisation**.



Language offers a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, structure and organisation of thoughts.



The most important way in which cognitive linguistics differs from other approaches to the study of language: language is assumed to reflect certain fundamental properties and design features of the human mind.

Language: A window to the mind

Scope of Linguistics:1916

Ferdinand de Saussure: A Course in General Linguistics (1916):

Describe and trace the history of all observable languages, amounting to tracing the history of families of languages and reconstructing the parent language of each family

To determine the forces that are **permanently and universally at work** in all languages, and to deduce the general laws to which all specific historical phenomena can be reduced.

To delimit and define itself.

Diachrony and Synchrony

Saussure's statement of 1916

The first two statements indicate a denial of nearly 3000 year old history of linguistics in Ancient India, China and the Arab world, focusing entirely on the Greek and Latin traditions.

A reflection of the eurocentricity of knowledge

The last statement gives us a frame of reference to evaluate a hundred years of growth of the field which has been simply overwhelming.
