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The History of Linguistics

Historical Linguistics

- Before 19th century, language was of interest of the philosophers as Plato and Aristotle. Plato, for example, was the first person who distinguished between noun and verbs.
- In 1786 Sir William Jones pointed out that Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Celtic and Germanic all had structural similarities. These languages must spring from one source. ' This discovery could be considered as the birthdate of linguistics
- There started comparative Grammar. Linguists started to compare various members of the Indo-European Language Family. They started to relate languages according to their origin and drew trees and diagrams for them.
- In the 19th century the linguists were busy with reconstructing Proto-Indo European and making hypotheses about the way it split into modern languages. ' In the mid -19th century Darwin published his famous book *Origins of Species* ' His book deals with Evolution and, of course, he attempted to chart the evolution of Languages.
- Language change became the point of focus. In the last quarter of the century: a group of scholars called themselves (The Young Grammarians) claimed that language changes regularly. They argued that if in any word of a given dialect, one sound changes; it will affect all the other occurrences of the same sound in similar phonetic surroundings. Example: ' Old English: *chin* pronounced *kin* spelled *cinn*. When the form is changed into (ch) it affected all the other words that start with the same beginning. Chicken, child, chide, chip, chill, cheese.
- Diachronic linguistics is the same thing as historical linguistics. Diachronic linguistics is the study of the changes in language over time.

Descriptive Linguistics / Early to Mid 20th Century

The emphasis shifted from language change to language description. Linguists started to study a specific language at a certain time. This is called Synchronic linguistics. Synchronic linguistics is the study of the linguistic elements and usage of a language at a particular moment.

- Structural Linguistics

Ferdinand de Saussure is considered as the father of modern linguistics. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure compared language to a game of chess: a chess piece in isolation has no value and that a move by any one piece has repercussions on all the others.

Ferdinand de Saussure argued that language is a carefully built structure of an interwoven elements.

- Linguistics in the USA

It was the beginning of an offshoot of anthropology. Anthropology is the study of people throughout the world, their evolutionary history, how they behave, adapt to different environments, communicate and socialize with one another. The study of anthropology is concerned both with the biological features that make us human (such as physiology, genetic makeup, nutritional history and evolution) and with social aspects (such as language, culture, politics, family and religion).

The anthropologists were eager to eager the culture of the fast-dying language e.g. the American-Indian tribes. Leonard Bloomfield laid down rigorous procedures for the description of any language. He considered that linguistics should deal objectively and systematically with observable data. He was interested in the way the item of any given language was arranged more than the meaning. A couple of problems arouse, and the Bloomfieldians laid down a valuable background of methodology for future generation.

- Generative Linguistics Mid-to-late 20th Century

Avram Noam Chomsky (/ˈnoʊm ˈtʃɒmski/; born December 7, 1928) is an American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, logician political commentator, social justice activist, and anarchosyndicalist advocate, sometimes described as the "father of modern linguistics.

Chomsky is also a major figure in analytic philosophy. He has spent most of his career at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and he is the author of more than 100 books.

Chomsky shifted the attention from the pure description of the utterances to the system that produces that output. According to Chomsky, the Bloomfieldian linguistics was both too ambitious and too limited. Why?

It too ambitious because it is unrealistic to have rules to perfectly describes languages from a mass of data. It is too narrow because it concentrated only on describing languages from spoken utterances. A grammar should be more than a description of old utterances but to account for future utterances. It means that the descriptive linguistics does not take into account creativity (productivity) into account.

Chomsky pointed out that anyone who knows a language must have internalized a set of rules which specify the sequences permitted in their language, the linguist's task is to discover those rules. A grammar that consists of a set of statement or rules, which specify which consequences of a language are possible and which ones are impossible, is a Generative Grammar.

Grammar is a device that generates all the grammatical sequences of a language and rejects all the non-grammatical ones. This grammar is perfectly explicit: TGG (Transformational Generative Grammar)

Chomsky initiated what is called language universals. All languages are likely to have important common prosperities. The universal grammar states that all children are born with an innate aptitude to acquire, develop, and understand language. If we look at grammar as the laws of language, we could say that all humans are born with an understanding of these laws. While different languages may have different grammar, humans have a natural predilection to learn and use these laws of language.

What is minimalism then? The Minimalist Program proposed that there was a single model of syntax which could replace all of those earlier theories. Morphemes are assigned to syntactic nodes through generic rules that aren't limited to a particular area of grammar. Rather than needing detailed and exception-ridden rules, morphemes are placed and moved as short a distance as possible. In order to do this a lot more syntactic structures are proposed, often each expressing a single semantic feature. The idea is that each morpheme will absorb a lot of syntactic structures in a predictable way. So the minimalism isn't referring to the

syntactic structures (which are rather the opposite of minimalistic), but how morphemes are assigned to those.

Language becomes a center point not only for the linguists but also for the psychologists, neurologists, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and others. That is the beginning of the optimality theory, and the foundation of the corpus linguistics.