

Basics of Language Science
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Lecture 2
Goals and Objectives

Welcome to the course, today we will look at the beginning of this course. We are looking at Basics of Language Science. Today, I want to introduce to you some of the concepts that we will use in this course and some of the ways in which we will look at various aspects in this course.

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RATIONALE

- Why study language?
- What is the relevance of language in our lives?
- How is it connected with everything that we do?



So, I want to take you through the rationale of the course that is why we study language? What is the relevance of language in our lives and how is it connected with everything else that we do? In short, we want to know why this course and what is the relevance and rationale of this course, that is a course on the study of language.

As I have introduced to you so far in this course, we are going to look at various components of language. We will start with those things, one by one. But before that I thought it is important for you to know why you must take this course and what is there for you to look forward to in this course.

So, understanding the rationale of everything that you do is important for all of us. We must know why we do what we are doing and why we must know such things about what we are doing. This is an important aspect for all of us and that we need to understand carefully. This, in the context of this course, is even more important and as we move forward in this course you will see the relevance of what I am saying.

So, let me start with this part, what is language and why we must study language? You see, language is a very unique human capacity. It is only humans as species that use language, meaning the language that we are talking about, we are talking about the language that humans speak.

Hence, as far as our knowledge of humans goes, we know that we only speak language. This is not to claim that other species do not have communication systems. I want to rule this possibility out right away, you may have several questions in your mind after I say that only humans use language.

You may come up with the question: do animals not have language? Do people who cannot speak because of a certain kind of disability not have language. To begin with we are talking about language that people speak and therefore, in such a way, in such a sense language is a unique and fascinating human capacity. We speak language, but all of us do not speak the same language. Lot of times people say language is important and language is very important because it helps us communicate which is very much true.

But look at the fact that if language and if the purpose of language, function of language was only to communicate would it not be easier for all of us that we spoke the same language all over the world, which will be much easier for communication. Why do we not speak the same language all over the world? In other words, why do people in different parts of the world speak different languages?

That is the primary point which brings our attention to language. At the same time associated with that is people do speak different languages but people speak a language and we do not even know the total number of languages spoken all over the world, but we know that people speak and people will speak the language.

So, we need to pay attention to that, it is only language which defines our being. Now, turn your attention to what we do with language. It will be easier for us to think about the importance and significance of language when we start looking at what is it that we cannot do without language? What can we do and what can we not do without language? Think about every domain of your life and see where language is important and where language is not important.

We may do everything, we may do different things in our lives, we may study different things in our lives, we work differently, we think differently, we live differently but we use language in all such domains. We use language for our studies, we use language for talking to others, we use language for reading. If you start making a list of things you will find there is almost nothing where we do not use language.

More importantly, this brings us to the point that: can we think without language? When we are not talking to anyone else, we are quiet and we are just thinking that is, in a way we can say we are talking to ourselves. But my question for you to think is do we need language for thinking when we talk to ourselves, do we need language? Or do we not need language for thinking? You will be surprised to see that you need language to talk to yourself also. In the same way that you need language to talk to others, such as the relevance of language in all our domains of life.

We practically cannot do many things without language. We need to communicate, we need to tell people about how we think and only when we communicate, we do so many things in the world. So, language becomes a prerequisite for our existence and everything that we do. I leave this point right here for you to think more about it. We cannot stop at any point and please understand that human's interest in this study of language is not new. Human's interest is as old as man's interest in the study of language is almost as ancient as human existence itself.

In the ancient period also, I can talk about a particular instance that occurred approximately 2500 years ago, 2500 years from now. Almost 2500 years ago there was a very active school of language study, it is called Paninian school. It is known that Panini studied the Sanskrit language. But if you look at what Panini really studied; Panini studied language as a science. Panini talked about the mechanism of sound production. Panini talked about the arrangement of word-formation. Panini talked about the underlying principles of sentence formation. Panini talked about underlying principles of meaning formation.

And those parts of his study were relevant and are relevant to the languages that we do not even know the names of. Think about the names of the languages that we speak in our country. We speak just so many languages in a totally different class. I will talk about how many languages we speak and what are the languages that we speak. But right today, I am only asking you to think about how many languages we speak.

The principles that Panini discovered 2,500 years ago are applicable to all those languages which did not even exist during the time Panini studied these things. One of the most famous books, is a very short book, which is Panini's contribution to the study of language is called Ashtadhyayi. In short, Hindi did not exist during the time when Panini lived and almost everything that Panini was talking about applies to Hindi as well.

So, what Panini actually studied was the science of language. In that context, we can say human's interest in the study of language is very old. People studying various different things like History, Sociology, Philosophy, Mathematics, Biology and modern day's Computer Science. All types of scholars from different domains have been interested in language and that makes language a very interesting object of study.

At the same time, you can see that people at different stages want to learn different languages and we need to know, what is it that helps us learn a language. For that also we need to know what it is that we call language. And in the scores, we are going to look at all these things in a systematic way which helps us understand language and therefore we call this course basics of language science. So, that is the one of the, that is the one small rationale that I wanted to discuss with you that is important for us to know why this course and what is this course about?

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

- This course will present language as a scientific object of inquiry to you.
- It will demonstrate how language is inbuilt in humans and the learning of language is so effortless for children.
- It will describe language as a social construct and markers of our identity too.
- This course will finally take you through the constituents of language and demonstrate their cognitive foundation and computation of components in human mind.



We are going to look at language as a scientific object of inquiry as I have told you earlier, just now I have talked about language. You see there is a difference between language and languages.

When we say language, we are talking about the underlying system of language. When we are talking about languages, we are talking about examples of those. So, when we name languages like English, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi. These are the names of languages.

So, these names are languages and we talk about it when we talk about it, we talk about language and when we say language we are talking about the underlying system, underlying principles of language. So, we are talking about that language and we are going to look at that as a scientific object of inquiry.

So, what is it that we mean by scientific inquiry when we say linguistics? We say linguistics is the scientific study of language. What is scientific about the study, I will discuss that with you, so that we understand with clarity two things today language and what is scientific about the study? So, in this course, we will also demonstrate how languages are inbuilt in humans and how learning is effortless for you. That is about the acquisition of language.

It will describe language as a social construct and marker of our identity too. You understand language is a very important marker of our identity. We define ourselves with the language that we speak. Many a time the name of our, the name of the language that we speak, and name of our cultural identity is the same, so when I speak Tamil, I am a speaker of Tamil and I belong to Tamil culture. So, Tamil is not just the name of a language, it is the name of the whole being. Tamil is the name of Tamil culture and at the same time it is the name of the language that people of the particular culture and community speak.

So, this is true for almost all languages like Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati and many of them. Maithili, Bhojpuri, Assamese, Manipuri, Naga, Mizo. Take any language, it applies to that. So, language is a very important marker of our identity just like religion and many other things. So, there are various different dimensions of language that we need to study. At the same time, language is learned in just one way. No matter which language we speak the process of learning is the same and we do not have a choice about learning.

The choice is governed by the languages spoken in our immediate society. Think about it as a child, can we decide or as a grownup person, can we decide for our children that we will only want our children to learn language x, y and z and not a, b and c. This option is not available to us. So, the choice of language that we learn is governed by the immediate society that is the languages spoken in our immediate society. A child is only going to learn the language that is spoken in her immediate society.

So, a child born in Chennai is highly likely to be speaking Tamil and not Punjabi or Kashmiri that is the purpose that is the point I am trying to make: that we do not have a choice, we do not have an option to pick from. So, it is a very important marker of our identity and learning the acquisition of language is something very different that we need to look at separately. So, this course has a component which will take you through all these things and it will help us understand the competition of these aspects and notions that we have about language in our mind and it will also help us see how they follow.

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Three aspects

- Acquisition [Human mind, cognition]
- Structure [Computation]
- Variation [Social dimensions]

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A man in a yellow shirt is speaking in the bottom right corner of the slide.

So, when you look at it there are three important aspects of language. One is about one particular aspect that is important to know; that is how we acquire it. So, the acquisition is an important aspect of language. The structure is how various components combine together to make a sentence. This is called structure.

How do various sounds combine together to make a word? How do words combine together to make a sentence? What do they combine with? How do they combine? These are the parts of a study which fall in structure part, formal part and then there are certain social dimensions, we know that same language is spoken in many ways in different societies.

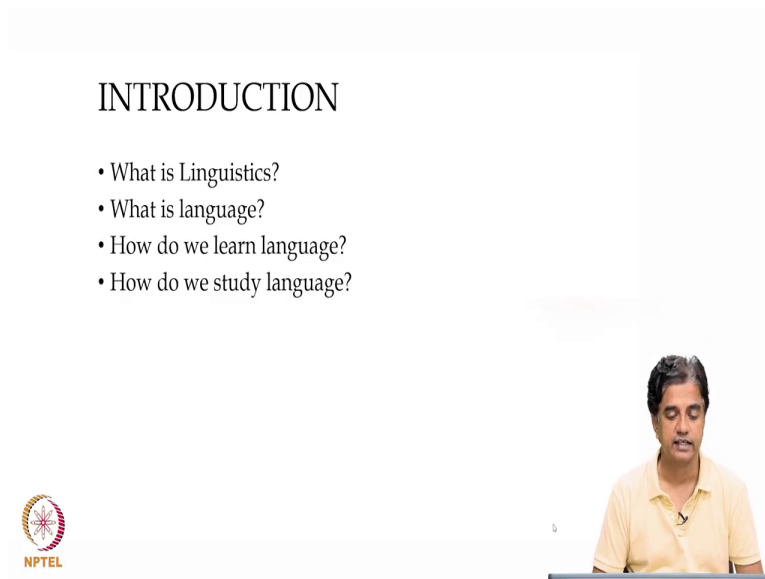
So, look at it. A language, Assamese is spoken in many ways in different parts of Assam. When you talk to Assamese speakers, they can identify a fellow speaker and locate them in terms of their geographical area. So, a speaker from the southern part of Assam, let us say Kokrajhar can sound very different from a speaker of Assamese Northern part, let us say Haflong or a Tinsukia or Dibrugarh.

Same way, a Bengali speaker from the Northern part of Bengal speaks a very different kind of Bengali from a Bengali speaker from the Southern part of Bengal. So, places like Siliguri, New Jalpaiguri, these are the languages Bengali is very different from how it is spoken in Southern

parts like Midnapore or for that matter Kolkata. So, the main point is the same language is spoken in different ways in different places. This is what we know as a variation.

What causes variation? How do we look at variation? Variation is an important reality of language in that no language is spoken the same way in every place. Language varies in terms of its geographical locations in different places. Still, they retain several parts together. So, what causes variation? These are the three different aspects of language Acquisition, Structure, and Variation. In this course, in particular, we will look at acquisition and structure.

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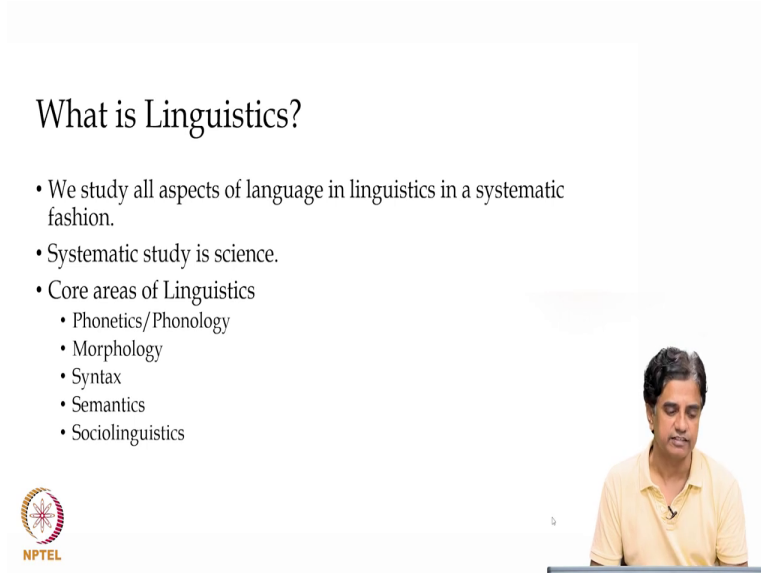
INTRODUCTION

- What is Linguistics?
- What is language?
- How do we learn language?
- How do we study language?

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And we will start looking at what is linguistics? We have talked about what language is? How do we learn a language? How do we study language? These are the things that we will look at?


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What is Linguistics?

- We study all aspects of language in linguistics in a systematic fashion.
- Systematic study is science.
- Core areas of Linguistics
 - Phonetics/Phonology
 - Morphology
 - Syntax
 - Semantics
 - Sociolinguistics

 NPTEL



So, when now is the time for me to explain to you, what is it we mean by scientific and systematic? So, when we say systematic study or scientific study, they are the same. Basically, anything that is systematic is scientific. So, anything that we do in a systematic fashion is called scientific. This is how we need to know the word scientific. So, when we say linguistics is the scientific study of language what we really mean is when we study language in a systematic way that is called linguistics.

So, allow me to spend a couple of minutes here to tell you what is systematic and different components of what makes study scientific. The primary, there are three steps in that. The primary step is called observation. How do we start looking at anything? How do we start working on anything? The first thing that happens to us is something that catches our attention, so we look at it and we try to observe.

So, this first step is called observation. After this step, we start describing that particular phenomenon or object, which is the second stage that is the stage of description and finally we reach a stage where on the basis of this description we can explain, so that is called explanation. If you think about these three steps very carefully that is observation, description, and explanation. You will understand that you can only reach the explanatory adequacy level through observation and descriptions.

It is very tough to describe things without observations and it is very tough to explain without a description. So, in a normal sense, these are three different sequential stages and once we go through these three stages in any kind of study that study becomes systematic and scientific. We are going to follow a similar pattern in the study of language as well. So, this is how any study becomes scientific and when we follow this pattern, the study of language is, it becomes systematic and is called scientific.

The core areas of linguistics as we know are Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, and Sociolinguistics. I want you to know that Phonetics is about the physical properties of sounds, that is what is the place of articulation of a sound, what is the manner of articulation of a sound, what are the sounds, features of sounds, and so on. This is called this study of sounds that we do in phonetics. Phonology is the study of abstract properties of sounds and their features.

Morphology is the study of how sounds combine together and syntax is the study of how different elements of language combine together not just words and semantics is about study of meaning and sociolinguistics is the study of language in society. There are many other parts of the study, there are many branches of the study of language within the ambit of linguistics, but I am mentioning only these because they are relevant to the basics and core of the study of foundational properties of language.

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What is language?

- Language is an impressive and fascinating human capacity. Human languages are strikingly powerful and complex systems.

(MARK CRIMMINS, Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy)

- Logical Problem of Language Acquisition:
'How do we know so much given so little?'
(Plato's problem)



And like we started with what is language? As I have told you it is an impressive and fascinating human capacity. Human languages are strikingly powerful and complex systems. This comes from the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

So, when we start looking at language, we have to think about language as an object of scientific inquiry. Different aspects of language, that is, what is complex, what makes language a system, what are the underlying complexities of it, and so on.

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Course

- How does this course work?
- What is basic about this course?
- How do we deal with the components of this course?
- No prerequisite for this course.



These things will become part of this course as we move forward in this course. I am looking forward to your participation at length. Please feel free to let us know what is not clear to you about what we have discussed so far and what is going to follow. We will try to clarify each one of them in the forum and we will also try to put those things in descriptions in new videos which will help us understand basic components of language science. Thank you.