Module: Linguistics

Level: L1- FILA

Time Allotted: 90 min

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Lecture 4: Approaches to Language and Linguistics

1. **Introduction**

Linguistics, which is commonly defined as the scientific study of language, is concerned with all aspects of human communication; of a description of speech sounds to how thoughts are expressed (in spoken and written forms). The science of language, as it has often been referred to, focuses on observing facts about language, setting hypotheses, testing their validity, and accepting or rejecting them. A linguist describes how language works not how it should work. Linguistics has two major roles:

1-To establish a workable theory at all levels (phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics)

2- To apply theoretical considerations to a description or analysis of language and languages.

1. **Descriptive Linguistics**

While the traditional approaches to language study is normative in its analysis and purpose, descriptive linguistics, as its name implies, denotes an investigation of language free of bias and prior judgment. Indeed, the linguist’s first task is to record speech as it is actually used; he is not concerned with whether instances of speech are correct or incorrect. There is nothing objective in the utterances that indicate that they are right or wrong, good or bad, elegant or ugly. Therefore, the new guideline for the linguist is not to prescribe rules and evaluate language usage, but to describe speech as objectively as possible. In this respect, where the prescriptive grammarian legislates and evokes logic, prestige and tradition, the linguist observes and describes the mass of speech acts.

1. **Micro and Macro Linguistics**

Linguistic analysis begins with the identification of speech sounds showing how these are combined into contrastive groups and meaningful elements. It examines the structure of words and their relationships in larger structures (phrases/sentences). Beyond the study of language structure, linguistics is interrelated with other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and neurology, etc. In this respect, Lyons (1981) distinguishes between two main fields in linguistics; these are micro and macro linguistics. Thus, what does linguistics cover?

The work of linguists falls into two main areas: language structure and language use. Thus, linguistics may be divided into two parts known as macro (language use) and micro (language structure) linguistics. Linguistics can also be interrelated.

***\* Micro-linguistics***: is concerned with studying language as a structured system with its own rules (i.e., the internal structure of language) without relation to other sciences or how to apply it in daily life. It has its own sub-branches that study each of these rules. These sub-branches are:

\*Phonetics and Phonology: studies speech sounds, how they are produced (phonetics), combined and arranged to convey meaning (phonology). While phonetics is concerned with the production and the perception of speech sounds, phonology is concerned with the application of phonetics to a particular language or languages. It is notably interested in establishing which unit of sound a language uses (phonemic system) and how it makes use of these phonemes.

\*Morphology: studies the forms of words (i.e., word formation). In other words, it is concerned with the way in which words and meaningful elements are constructed and how they function (how morphemes combine to make meaningful unit: free and bound morphemes)

\*Syntax: studies how words are systematically arranged to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. Chomsky‘s transformational generative grammar relied heavily on syntactic analysis. Syntax deals with sentence structure.

\*Semantics: studies all aspects of meaning in language (lexical semantics). It examines the relationship between words and the meanings to which they refer.

\*Pragmatics: studies meaning within context. In other words, how utterances are used in communicative acts.

***\* Macro-linguistics:*** deals with the relation of the language with all the aspects beyond the language itself. More precisely, it is concerned with the external view of language itself as related to other sciences and how to apply it in daily life. It has a variety of sub-branches like:

\* Psycholinguistics: studies the relation between language and human mind.

\*Sociolinguistics: the study of language in social and cultural contexts.

\*Neurolinguistics: studies how language is represented in the brain.

\*Stylistics: the study of language and literature.

\*Anthropological Linguistics: studies the role of language in relation to human cultural patterns and beliefs.

\* Computational Linguistics: the simulation of language by the use of computers.

\* Comparative Linguistics: the study of different languages and their respective linguistic systems.

\* Historical Linguistics: the study of language change over time.

\* Applied linguistics: the study of language teaching.

The branches have become more numerous over the years as the subject has grown but, arguably, the principal developments in linguistics in recent years have been in stylistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics.