Module: Linguistics

Level: L1- FILA

Time Allotted: 90 min

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Lecture 2: Traditional Language Studies (TLS)

1. **Traditional Language Studies (TLS)**

Traditional Language Studies, or TLS for short, refers to the scholarly works that dealt with the nature of language prior to the advent of modern linguistics. Those studies generally include four main types of grammatical study which are: 1- Classical Grammar 2- Medieval Grammar 3- Pedagogical Grammar 4- Comparative Grammar.

* **Classical Grammar**

By classical grammar we mean the investigations into the nature of language carried out first by the Greek and Latin grammarians. This period marked the birth of the grammatical thought in the Classical Greece, namely by Platon (429-347) BC and Aristotle (384-322) BC. However, the main investigators of Greek grammar were the stoic philosophers and Alexandrian grammarians in the 3rd century BC. As a matter of fact, the Alexandrian grammarian Dionysius Thrax (170-90) BC elaborated the first handbook of grammar defining it as “the technical knowledge of the language generally employed by poets and writers”. Subsequently, Latin grammarians developed further textbooks in the medieval period. The most leading Latin grammarians were Aelius Donatus (4th century AD) and Priscianus (5th century AD). Grammarians studied topics such as the origin of language, logic, rhetoric and etymology.

**Assumptions of Classical Grammar**

\* *Grammar is writing*: writing is considered as the primary medium of language expression. Speech is simply an imperfect copy of writing. This view stems from the prevalence of the sacred and secular writings in Greek and Latin.

\**Grammar is prescriptive:* since the written classical languages are regarded as pure, correct and prestigious, it is essential to prescribe the rules and norms of correct usage. Grammar becomes, therefore, the art of writing well (usage grammar). In this sense, the prescriptive rules dictate precisely the usage to be followed by all speakers and writers.

\**Classical languages are logical:* Greek and Latin are regarded as more logical, more advanced and richer than the so- called primitive languages. As a result, they are the only written languages worthy of scholarly study.

**- Medieval Grammar**

The middle ages perpetuated the prevalence of Latin as the language of all theological and scholarly works and witnessed the emergence of what is called speculative grammar. This type of grammar relied solely on scholastic philosophy as the basis of any exploration.

* **Pedagogical Grammar**

The 18th century British grammars were essentially pedagogical in nature. They attempted to teach a great number of people how to read and write in a standard language. They also strived to establish a set of language norms and rules (prescriptive grammar) for the rising middle class.

* **Comparative Philology**

The discovery of Panini’s grammar of Sanskrit, which resembled Greek, Latin, and Germanic, led many grammarians to suggest the existence of a common original language. This observation gave rise to two types of language study (comparative and historical). In effect, the investigation took into account the similarities between languages and the establishment of a new general theory of linguistic change and relationships known as comparative historical linguistics.

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**2. Main Contributions of Traditional Grammar**

**-**Despite its lack of a theoretical systematic analysis, classical grammar has at its record a rich technical vocabulary and sound rules governing correct usage of language including:

-The classification of the patterns of inflection, and the distinction between active and passive voice as well as transitive and intransitive verbs.

-The classification of all Greek words in terms of case, gender, number, tense, voice and mood.

-The classification of words according to gender.

-The classification of words into eight parts of speech: nouns, verbs, articles, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections.