

UNIT-II

What is Linguistics?

Linguistics is a scientific study of language. It shares with other sciences a concern to be objective, systematic, consistent and explicit in its account of language. The field of linguistics includes both science and humanities. Linguistics is learning about language rather than learning a language. In linguistics we investigate the mechanism of a language. While speaking a language we are using the sounds, words, etc. of that language; behind these uses is the mechanism which enables us to do so. We study language because it is important for us to understand this mechanism.

Linguistics as a Science:

Linguistics is a science, in both general and specific terms. We use the term 'science' for any knowledge that is based on clear, systematic and rational understanding.

Linguistics studies language: Language is a phenomenon which is both objective and variable. It has a concrete shape and occurrence. A linguist studies the components of a language, *eg*: He observes the occurrence of speech - sounds, or the way in which words begin or end. Language, like other phenomena, is objective because it is observable with the senses.

Observation leads to processes of classification and definition. Linguistics observes the features of language, classifies these features as being sound features of particular types, or words belonging to particular classes on the basis of similarity or difference with other sounds and words.

Linguistics is also a social science because it studies language which is a form of social behaviour and exists in interaction between human beings in society. Linguistics is both an empirical science and a social science. It is part of the study of humanities as well. In understanding language, humankind can understand itself.

Scope of Linguistics:

Descriptive linguistics:

Descriptive linguistics is concerned with the description and analysis of the ways in which a language operates and is used by a given set of speakers at a given time.

- Robins

Modern linguistics is mainly **descriptive** because it attempts to describe fully and accurately the structure of a language as it exists at a given time. It is a **synchronic** study of language. It describes systems in a language at all levels of structure: The phonological level or system of sounds, the morphological level or system of word formation, the syntactic level, or level of sentence formation, and the semantic system or level of meaning.

<i>Levels of Analysis</i>	<i>Levels of Structure</i>
Phonetics and Phonology	Sounds
Morphology	Word Formation
Syntax	Sentence Formation
Semantics	Meanings
Discourse	Connected Sentences

The main concern of modern linguistics is to describe a language, to study its nature, and to establish a theory of language. That is, it aims at studying the components of the language system and to ultimately arrive at an explanatory statement on how the system works. Modern linguistics is generally known as *descriptive*.

Modern descriptive linguistics is based on a structural approach. The terms **synchronic** and **diachronic** given by Saussure (1916) are used to distinguish between the description of a stage of a language at a given time and the description of changes that take place in language during the passage of time.

Comparative linguistics:

Comparative linguistics is concerned with comparing two or more languages. When the history of these languages is compared with a view to discovering the historical relation between these languages, it is known as **comparative historical study**. The comparative and historical methods are based on discovering relationships between languages.

Proto – Indo – European
(some of its branches)





Linguistics look for sound correspondences and build **cognates**. A cognate is a word which is related genetically to other words which together form a set of cognates descended from a proto-language.

frater (Latin)
brother (English)
bhrata (Sanskrit)

These are cognates belonging to a set relating to a word which may have existed in Proto-Indo-European. When two or more descriptions of language are contrasted (eg: Tamil and Hindi), it is known as **contrastive linguistics**.

Anthropological Linguistics:

The study of language variation and use in relation to the cultural patterns and beliefs of the human race, is investigated using the theories and methods of anthropology.

Applied Linguistics:

The application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to the elucidation of language problems that have arisen in other domains is known as Applied Linguistics. The term is especially used with reference to the field of foreign language learning and teaching.

Biological Linguistics:

The study of the biological conditions for language development and use in human beings is known as Biological Linguistics.

Clinical Linguistics:

The application of linguistic theories and methods to the analysis of disorders of spoken, written, or sign language is known as Clinical Linguistics.

Computational Linguistics:

The study of language using the techniques and concepts of computer science, especially with reference to the problems posed by the fields of machine translation information retrieval, and artificial intelligence is known as Computational Linguistics.

Educational Linguistics:

The application of linguistic theories and methods to the study of the teaching and learning of a language in schools and other educational settings is known as Educational Linguistics.

Ethnolinguistics:

The study of language in relation to ethnic types and behaviour, especially with reference to the way social interaction proceeds is known as Ethnolinguistics.

Geographical Linguistics:

The study of the regional distribution of languages and dialects, seen in relation to geographical factors in the environment is known as Geographical Linguistics.

Mathematical Linguistics:

The study of the mathematical properties of language, using concepts from such fields as algebra, computer science and statistics is known as Mathematical Linguistics.

Neurolinguistics:

The study of the neurological basis of language development and use in human beings, especially of the brain's control over the processes of speech and understanding is known as Neurolinguistics.

Philosophical Linguistics:

The study of the role of language in the elucidation of philosophical concepts, and of the philosophical status of linguistic theories, methods and observation is known as Philosophical Linguistics.

Psycholinguistics:

The study of the relationship between linguistic behaviour and the psychological processes (eg: memory, attention) that underlie it is known as Psycholinguistics.

Sociolinguistics:

The study of the interaction between language and the structure and functioning of society is known as Sociolinguistics.

Statistical Linguistics:

The study of the statistical or quantitative properties of language is known as Statistical Linguistics.

Theological Linguistics:

The study of the language used by biblical scholars, theologians and others involved in the theory and practice of religious belief is known as Theological Linguistics.