

# LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS



FOR STUDENTS OF MA  
ENGLISH SEM III  
GENERAL LINGUISTICS

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# CONTENTS

## ➤ What is a Language?

- Defining Language
- Characteristics
- Importance

## ➤ What is Linguistics?

- Descriptive, Comparative, Historical Linguistics
- Levels of Linguistic Analysis
- Branches of Linguistics

## ➤ What is Grammar?

- Fundamental Units

# Contents

- Revolution in Grammar
  - Traditional, Structuralism, Transformational Generative Grammar
  - Phrase Structure Rules
  - Transformational Rules
- Conclusion

# WHAT IS A LANGUAGE?

- Language is human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, feelings and desired by means of a system of sound symbols.
- This is a technical definition of Language.
- For a common man, a language is a means of letting others know what he has in mind.
- It is very difficult to say in precise words as to what constitutes language.
- There are several definitions offered by linguists which bring out the important characteristics of language.

# DEFINING LANGUAGE

- According to Sapir, “ Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desired by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols”.
- According to Broch and Trager, “ Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates”.
- In the words of Wardaugh, “Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication”.

- In the words of Chomsky, a renowned linguist, “Language is a set (finite or infinite) of sentences each infinite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements”.

Each of these definitions suggest certain features as the defining characteristics of language.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE

- Language is a means of communication.
- Language is arbitrary
- Language is conventional and non instinctive
- Language is symbolic
- Language is systematic
- Language is vocal
- Language is a social behaviour
- Language is unique
- Language is human

# CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE

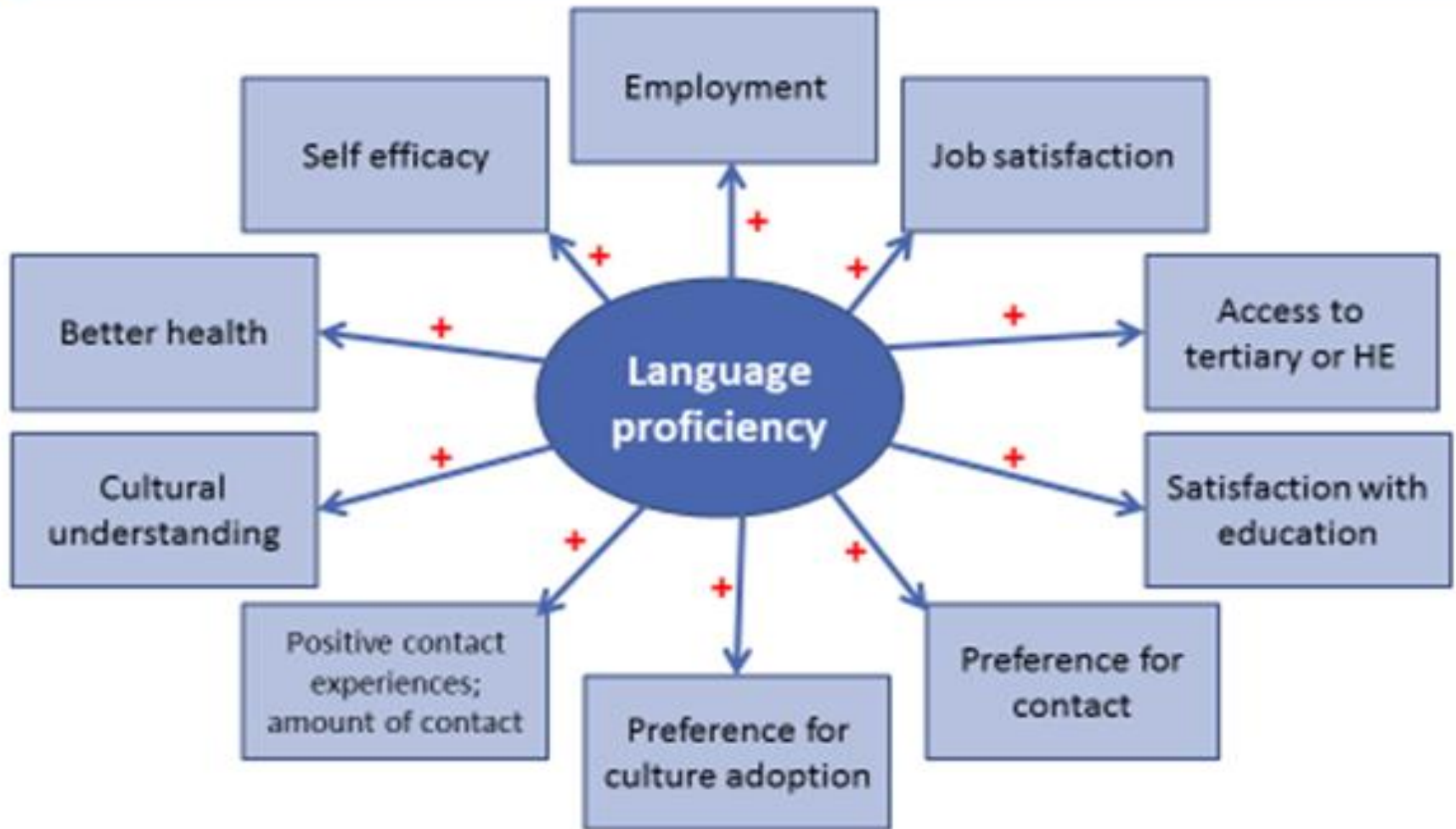
- Language is open-ended and extendable
- Language is Modifiable
- Language is structurally complex

The term language refers to all the specific languages used in all the communities. Man, being a social animal, is dependent on the use of language. To lead a smooth life, everybody has to express himself and the only way he can do this is through language.





# Importance of language



# WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?

- Linguistics is the scientific study of language.
- Linguistics does not study an individual language, it studies 'language' in general.
- According to Robins, “Linguistics is concerned with human language as a universal and recognizable part of the human behaviour and of the human faculties....”
- Linguists try to study the ways in which language is organised to fulfill human needs, as a system of communication.
- There is a difference between a person who knows many languages (polyglot) and a linguist, who studies general principles of language organisation and language behaviour, often with reference to some actual language or languages.

- Linguistics is learning about language rather than learning a language.
- This distinction is often explained as the difference between learning how a car works and learning how to drive a car.
- In linguistics we investigate the mechanism of language, its parts and how these parts fit together to perform particular functions, and also why they are organised or arranged in a certain manner.
- In earlier times, the study of language was considered to be the study of grammar of some prestigious or classical language such as Latin, Sanskrit, or Greek.
- Today we consider all languages as fit objects of language study.

# DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS

- the branch of linguistics which describes the structure of a language or languages as they exist, without reference to their histories or to comparison with other languages.
- All academic research in linguistics is descriptive; like all other scientific disciplines, its aim is to describe the reality as it is, without the bias of preconceived ideas about how it ought to be.
- Modern descriptive linguistics is based on a structural approach to language, as exemplified in the work of Leonard Bloomfield and others.
- Linguistic description is often contrasted with linguistic prescription

- Descriptive grammarians focus their analysis on how all sorts of people in all sorts of environments, usually in more casual, everyday settings, communicate, while prescriptive grammarians focus on the grammatical rules and structures predetermined by linguistic registers and figures of power for those who are under the control of said authorities to use.
- Let us take the example of *'fewer than'* vs *'less than'*
- A descriptive grammarian would state that both statements are equally valid, as long as the receiver of the message can understand the meaning behind the statement.
- A prescriptive grammarian, on the other hand, would analyze the rules and conventions behind the statements made and determine which statement is correct or otherwise preferable according to those rules.
- Various studies have found that although the majority of linguists would be descriptive grammarians, the majority of public school teachers tend to be prescriptive.

# COMPARATIVE LANGUAGE

- Comparative linguistics is study of the relationships or correspondences between two or more languages and the techniques used to discover whether the languages have a common ancestor.
- The fundamental technique of comparative linguistics is the Comparative method, which aims to compare phonological systems, morphological systems, syntax and the lexicon.
- Using this comparative method, linguists have been able to establish the connections among a group of languages

- It aims to prove that two or more languages are descended from a single proto-language by comparing lists of cognate terms.
- The comparative method itself developed out of the attempts to reconstruct the proto-language.
- In 1786 Sir William Jones, a British scholar, On eof the former who demonstrated one of the comparative methods:
- He asserted that Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin were related to one another and had descended from acommon source.
- He based this assertion on observations ofsimilarities in sounds and meanings among thethree languages.

For example, the English word “brother” resembles:

- the Sanskrit word bhratar
- the Latin word frater
- the Greek word phrater,

Which all have the same meaning “Brother”

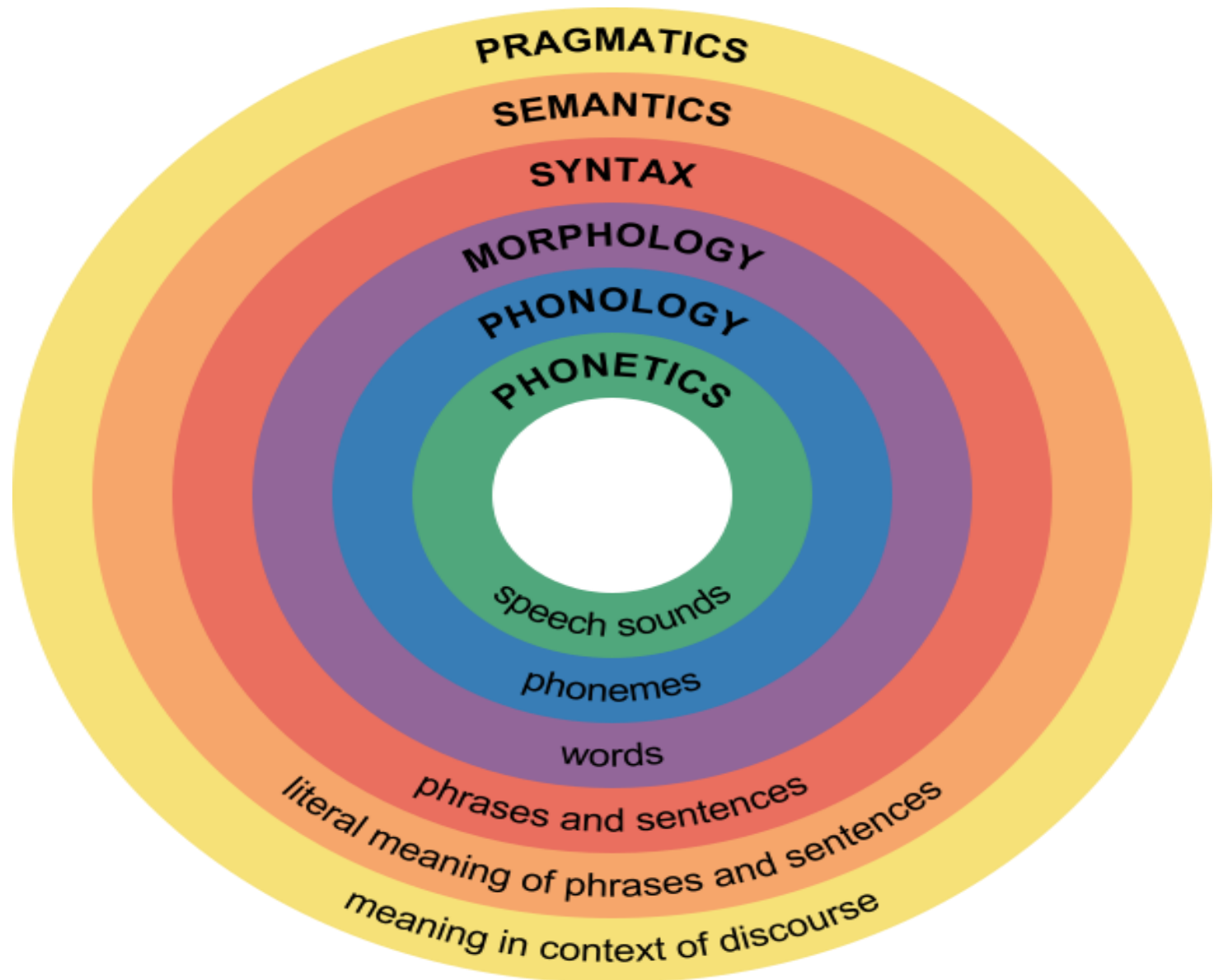
- Comparative linguists also look for similarities in the way words are formed in different languages.
- Latin and English, for example, change the form of a word to express different meanings,
- as when the English verb go changes to went and gone to express a past action.
- Chinese, on the other hand, has no such inflected forms.



# HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

- **Historical linguistics**, also termed **diachronic linguistics**, is the scientific study of language change over time.
- Principal concerns of historical linguistics include:
  1. to describe and account for observed changes in particular languages
  2. to reconstruct the pre-history of languages and to determine their relatedness, grouping them into language families (comparative linguistics)
  3. to develop general theories about how and why language changes
  4. to describe the history of speech communities
  5. to study the history of words, i.e. etymology

# LEVELS OF LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS



# Linguistics

Language

## Micro Linguistics

## Macro Linguistics (Applied Linguistics)

## Other Branches

Phonology

Sociolinguistics

Lexicology

Morphology

Psycholinguistics

Comparative  
Historical  
Linguistics

Syntax

Neurolinguistics

Semantics

Anthropological  
Linguistics

Language  
Acquisition

Morpho  
phonemic /  
Morphophonology

Morphosyntax

# WHAT IS GRAMMAR?

- Every speaker of a language is capable of distinguishing between a sentence and a non-sentence.
- There is some sort of linguistic etiquette, some inherent ability that helps his to distinguish between grammatical and ungrammatical strings of words, between correct and incorrect sentences.
- This kind of knowledge is described as the knowledge of the Grammar of the language.
- It is the knowledge of the grammar that enables a speaker to interpret grammatical strings or sentences, to perceive ambiguity in a grammatical sentence or to perceive synonymy in two sentences and to understand and generate new sentences.

- Grammar is traditionally divided into morphology and syntax.
- Morphology is essentially the grammar of words and deals with the forms of words.
- Syntax is the grammar of sentences and is concerned with the way sentences are formed or expanded.
- Grammar is different from, infact a bridge between phonology (the study of sounds) and semantics (the study of meaning).

# WHAT GRAMMAR IS NOT?

- A grammar of a language is not a book written about it.
- The grammar of the language is not formed only in the written language ; spoken languages do have their grammar.
- All languages have their grammar. There is no language without a grammatical system of its own.

# 5 Fundamental Units of Grammar



SENTENCES

CLAUSES

PHRASES

WORD

MORPHEME

- The relation between these units is one of composition.
- The 'sentence' is the highest unit and the 'morpheme' is the lowest unit on a scale of rank order.
- Units of higher rank are composed of units of lower rank.
- Units of higher rank can be analysed or decomposed into units of lower rank.



# REVOLUTION IN GRAMMAR

## TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

- By traditional grammar is meant basically the Aristotelian orientation towards the nature of language as exemplified in the works of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, the speculative work of the medievals, and the prescriptive approach of the 18<sup>th</sup> century grammarians.
- Preference was give to the written form of the language than to the spoken part., national definitions, reliance on Latin grammar etc.
- Its study is not based on the observable linguistic facts of a language.

# Certain Misconceptions

- Failed to recognize that language was primarily vocal.
- Rules were restricted to more formal styles only.
- They tried to formulate rules for English language in terms of another language, especially Latin, because of the prestige it has during those days.
- They defined the parts of speech in terms of their meaning: gave conceptual or notional definitions and not in terms of observable behaviour.
- All these led to extreme vagueness in the rules and definitions.
- It was an illogical prescriptive approach.

# Example

- The traditional grammarians defined noun as ‘ the name of a person, place or a thing’ .
- Such a definition of noun, as David Crystal puts it,  
“.....tells us nothing about the grammar of noun at all, it merely gives us a rather vague indication of what nouns are used to refer to in the outside world– what they mean.”
- A grammatical definition of a noun must give us grammatical information : it should, for example, tell us where in a sentence noun can appear, how they inflect, whether they follow or precede articles and prepositions and so on.
- The above definition gives us none of this.

MUSICAL WERTHEIMERSSTREIT SOCIOLOGY VERSTEHEN VERIFICATIIONISM PSYCHUANALYSIS  
STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY BIOGENETIC-STRUCTURALISM ALBERT SECHEHAYE STRUCTUR  
WORLD WAR II DECONSTRUCTION CRITICAL THEORY SYMBOL CONTRASTIVE DISTRIBUTION C  
FEMINIST THEORY ERIC WOLF PRAGUE LINGUISTIC CIRCLE ENGAGED THEORY EMMANUEL TE  
HERMENEUTIC ANTHROPOLOGY FRENCH LANGUAGE FRANÇOIS CHATELET READING CAPITAL  
DELEUZE IDEOLOGY HUMAN GEOGRAPHY COURSE IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS HERMENEUTICS  
OTHER LITERARY CRITICISM LEONARD BLOOMFIELD MARXISM JAPANESE LANGUAGE JAMES

LINGUISTICS JACQUES LACAN

# STRUCTURALISM

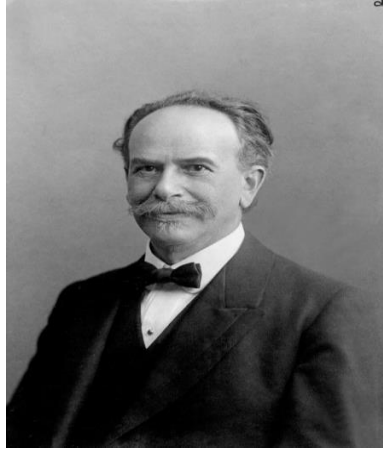
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# Proponents of Structuralism



Ferdinand-de-Saussure



Franz Boaz



Edward Sapir



Leonard Bloomfield

- The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by new approaches to grammar as suggested by Ferdinand-de-Saussure and other American Linguists.
- Structuralism as a school of linguistics was most influential during the period between early 1930's to late 1950's.
- It was a reaction against the approach of the traditional grammarians.
- Linguistic scientists by now had begun to study language in terms of observable and verifiable data and describe it after the behaviour of the language as it is used.
- It was a descriptive approach.

# Major Tenets

1. Language is systematic.
  2. Every language has its own grammar
  3. All the living languages are subject to change.
  4. Speech is the primary form of the language.
  5. Language is descriptive and not prescriptive.
- The structural linguists attempted to describe language in terms of its structures., as it is used and tried to look for ‘regularities’ or ‘patterns’ and ‘rules’ in language structure.
  - Bloomfield, the most famous exponent of this school envisaged language structure in a very precise and limited way.

- He associated it with phoneme as the unit of phonology and morpheme as the unit of grammar.
- Phoneme is the smallest unit of speech sound distinguishing one word (or word element) from another, as the element *p* in “tap,” which separates that word from “tab,” “tag,” and “tan.”
- Morpheme is the smallest grammatical unit of speech; it may be a word, like “place” or “an,” or an element of a word, like *re-* and *-ed* in “reappeared.”
- This kind of description of the structure of language stemmed from the desire to be completely precise, scientific and logical as against the unscientific, illogical and prescriptive approach which preceded it.



- Samuel R. Levin puts it in this way,

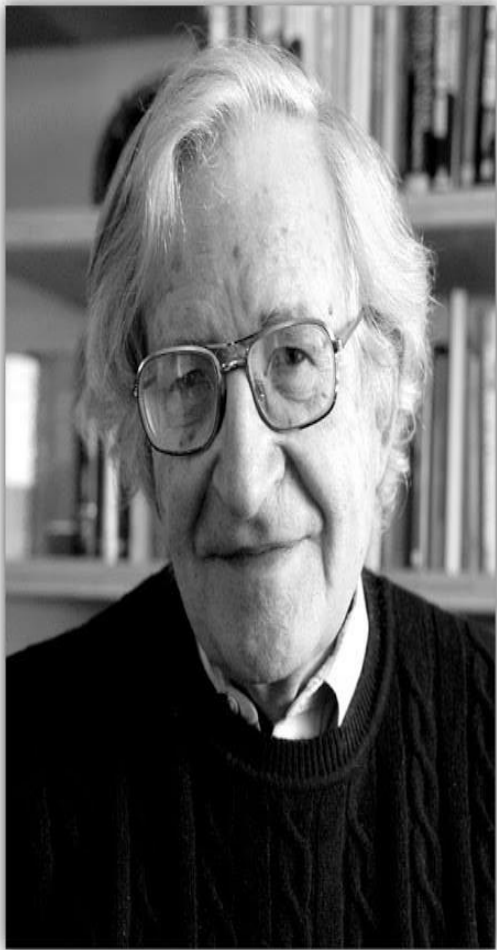
“.....that their fundamental difference emerges from the following statement that structuralists unlike traditionalists are interested in making only what has been called “vulnerable” statements about grammar.....By “vulnerable” statements is meant simply statements whose claim to be true can be either verified or disapproved. This is a way of saying that structural statements are made, only about observable, formal features of a language.”

# Weakness of Structuralism

- Both the phoneme and morpheme are units of form rather than meaning, so Noam Chomsky criticized this school of linguistics for being corpus bound and for its neglect of meaning.
- Language is not merely a catalogue of items as structuralists describe it.
- It failed to account for ambiguities in sentences, their inter-relatedness and the ideas of grammaticality and acceptability.
- It is a mere record of data which ignores the deep and surface structure of the sentences.

# The Transformational- Generative Grammar





**“Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.**

*~ Noam Chomsky*

- In order to provide answers to the questions which have been left unanswered by the structuralists, there emerged in the late 1950's, another school of linguists, its exponent being Noam Chomsky.
- The grammar that he has put forward is called as Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG).
- This theory of grammar takes into account both the linguistic data and the facts about language that is productive, arbitrary and complex.
- Transformation means transforming one sentence into another.
- Analysis of this kind shows us the relationship between various types of sentences such as active-passive, affirmative-negative-interrogative and many more.

- It not only analyses the sentences, divides them into parts and shows the functions of various parts but also takes the sentences and completely re-arranges them and shows the ambiguity and the inter-relationship between different sentences.
- In the transformational sentences, the first is the Kernel sentence, which is basic, active, affirmative and declarative in form and the sentences which we get after transforming the kernel are the non-kernel sentences.
- An **example** of a **kernel sentence** is 'The man opened the door,' and an **examples** of **non-kernel sentences** are 'The man did not open the door' or 'Did the man open the door?' or 'The door was opened by the man.'

- According to American linguist, Noam Chomsky, “Every sentence of the language will either belong to the kernel or will be derived from the strings underlying one or more kernel sentences by a sequence of one or more transformations...”
- In order to understand a sentence it is necessary to know the kernel sentences from which it originates and the phrase structure of each of these elementary components, as well as the transformational history of development of the given sentence from those kernel sentences.

- Another important characteristic of transformational generative grammar is that it is 'generative'.
- A generative grammar is a system of explicit rules. The rules of generative grammar are so designed that they generate all and only the grammatical sentences of a language.
- Generative grammar is not concerned with any actual set of sentences of the language but with the possible set of sentences.
- With the coming of this approach, now there is no need of mugging up the rules of grammar.
- Now we have a description which is based on the understanding of the observable facts of a language.



- Chomsky presented three models of grammar in his revolutionary book *Syntactic Structures* :

1. Finite State Grammar
2. Phrase Structure Grammar
3. Transformative Generative Grammar

- The finite state grammar is the most basic and elementary and is full of inadequacies.
- The Phrase Structure Grammar takes us a long way in removing these shortcomings.
- The Transformational model is an extension of the Phrase Structure Grammar.

# PHRASE STRUCTURE RULES

- The Phrase Structure Grammar consists of PS Rules as shown below:
- S-----NP + VP
- NP-----[restrictor, pre-determiner, determiner, ordinal, cardinal or classifier] + N
- VP-----VG + NP
- VG-----Aux + V
- Aux-----Tense + (modal)+(perfective)+(progressive)
- Prep. P -----Prep + NP
- NP-----NP + Prep.P

- Here,

S – Sentence

NP- Noun Phrase

VP- Verb Phrase

N –Noun

VG- Verb Group

V-Verb

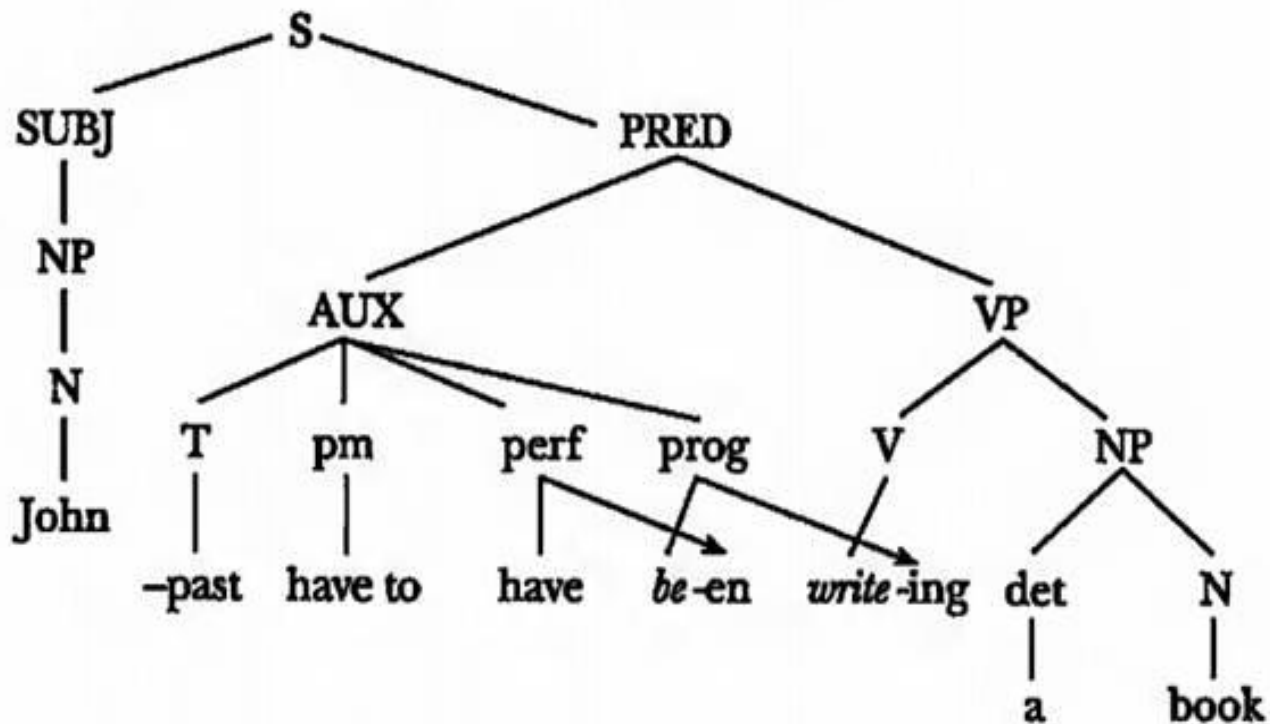
Aux- Auxiliry

Prep.P- Preposition Phrase

- Syntactic categories which occur on the left are called as non-terminal symbols and those occurring on the right are called terminal sumbols, representing morphemes.

# Example

John had to have been writing a book.



This tree-diagram method is also known as phrase-marker.

- Phrase Structure Rules are mostly context-free.
- These are hemmed with limitations.
- It is efficient in explaining the ‘intra-sentence constituent elements’ but cannot show inter-sentence relations.
- It runs into difficulty when seeking to account for ambiguous sentences.
- PS Rules cannot explain such discontinuous sentences such as, ‘He called me up’, when the object is a pronoun and the discontinuous contribution is obligatory.

# TRANSFORMATIONAL RULES

- Through the transformational rules, we transform a kernel sentence into non- kernel sentence like passive, interrogative and negative.
- To transform a kernel sentence into passive, the following rule is applied :

NP1-Aux-V-NP2 -----NP2-Aux-be-en-V-by-NP1

- To transform a kernel sentence into interrogative the following rule is to be applied:

NP-Tense[be/have/modal]-----Tense[be/have/modal]-NP

- To transform a kernel sentence into negative sentence, the following rule is to be followed:

Tense-[modal/be/have]-----negative tense----[modal/be/have]-  
not

- Here NP1 stands for Noun Phrase 1
- NP2- Noun Phrase 2
- NP- Noun Phrase
- Aux- Auxiliary

# Mentalism

- Another revolutionary feature of TG Grammar was that they believed that everybody learns a language, not because they are subjected to similar conditioning process, but because they possess an inborn capacity which permits them to acquire a language as normal maturational process.
- Chomsky called this innate knowledge as Language Acquisition Device (LAD).
- He also insisted that every normal human being is born into a society with a LAD, which embodies the structure and nature of human language.



# CONCLUSION

- To conclude, we can say that researches in the field of grammar have been very useful not only in the sense that they have clarified certain very basic things but also helped a lot in clarifying and simplifying the teaching and learning of English language.
- Transformative Generative Grammar, it may be said is not the last word.
- Research is still going on and better theories of grammar may replace it in years to come.

Thank You!

