Diversity of languages has always been a special concern of anthropological writings. Exploring ‘other cultures and other societies’; field researchers often came across different languages and array of dialects. They were fascinated by the variety of sound bytes that human beings were capable of producing. One of the early traits for which humans were always known was their ability to communicate. It was Primate *Homo sapiens* ability to communicate and learn languages that distinguished him from other primates. We all know that most other species have also developed their own sound byte systems to communicate with each other.

**Detailed studies of bees, birds, apes and dolphins among many others, have conclusively demonstrated that they have very complex systems of intra-species communication which, with considerable difficulty, can be decoded by human observers.**

**That cross-species communication, not least between humans and other animals, also occurs will be confirmed by anyone familiar with domesticated beasts. Apes, certainly, dogs and horses, up to a point, cats and sheep barely, can all be trained to interact quite meaningfully with human beings and to an extent vice versa.**

**Ralph Grillo**

*Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*

Ed. By Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (2002)
Some of you must have trained your pet animals to understand your commands. But the fundamental difference between their learning and our language skills is that we can learn any language. We can train ourselves to comprehend other languages and dialect in short spans. We can teach others to understand our dialects and languages. It is this unique distinction that most other species lack. Most other species can only imitate.

Human Culture as we know it is ultimately dependent on a system of communication far more complex than that of any other animal.

William A. Haviland

It is important for you to remember that it is not only the spoken word but also the sounds that we produce which convey meanings. During a day, we do not always use complete sentences to communicate. We make gestures accompanied by audible ‘hun’, ‘han’ ‘na’ etc to submit our approval or negation. Anthropologists have often stressed the need to comprehend and document other means of communication. These other means of communication include gestures, facial expressions, the manner of speech etc. These are often clubbed and called paralinguistic features.

In this lesson, we will explore origins of linguistics, the fundamental principles on which languages are based, concerns with grammar, history of languages, cultural diversity, linguistic differentiation and role languages sometimes play in generating social inequality, gender differentiation and subordination and issues relating to ‘identity formation.

LINGUISTICS DEFINED

It is the modern scientific study of all aspects of language. (William A. Haviland: 1993)

The Scientific study of language or languages whether from a historical or comparative (diachronic) or from a descriptive, structural (synchronic) point of view. (cf. Philology in Webster’s Dictionary: 1987)

To understand linguistics and its relationship with anthropology, we must first explore basic understanding of what we mean by ‘language’. All of us use language and are taught to use it from early childhood. Virtually speaking, in almost all the cultural practices documented across the globe till today, we know that there are symbolic practices relating to the first syllable to be whispered to the infant. If you ask your parents as to what was the first word uttered in your ear just after birth and who uttered it, you can augment for yourself the importance of learning and accompanied values with it. The utterance, who utters it and what impact it will have on your future, are all intrinsic to your future social development. This utterance is symbolic. It introduces you to the first syllables that you will gradually grow to convert into meaningful sentences. The meaningful conversion of all utterances in other words defines Language.
**LANGUAGE**

A system of communication using sounds that are put together in meaningful ways according to a set of rules.

Language is also a system that enables us to translate our concerns, beliefs, and perceptions into symbols that can be understood and interpreted by others. (William A. Haviland, 1993)

A term often used to refer to the unique verbal communication system employed by humans, and which is characterized, amongst other features, by its highly specialized and independent development, its complexity of symbolic use and its arbitrary nature.

In *Linguistics*—the term is applied in a rather technical sense, referring to the total set of possible utterances which can be generated by a given grammar. (Charlotte Seymour Smith, Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 1986)

As you work to expand your understanding of languages and linguistic anthropology, you will realize that certain words or expressions used in various languages in different parts of the world have remarkable similarity. Take for example various expressions used to address mother in different languages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Mutter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>Mor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Irish</td>
<td>mathir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>ma: ter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>me’: te: r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>mayr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>mo’te’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
<td>ma: ta’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent that similarity between these words is far too close to be missed by any observer of the languages. It is believed that all these words may have been inherited from a common ancestral language.

All of the languages that have developed from the same parent language are said to be genetically related and to constitute a language family. The languages above belong to the Indo-European family. By comparing words in such languages, it is possible to reconstruct vocabulary from their common ancestor (Mithun, 2006:124).
The soul of language is believed to be Grammar. But before we come to meaningful construction of sounds, it is imperative to understand that there are thousands of languages in the world. Many of these languages are not even written. They remain a manner of speech. A large number of these languages are not known to follow any acknowledged concepts of grammar. An anthropologist is trained to work in cultures and communities relatively little known previously. It is important that he acquires some meaningful ‘understanding of how speech sounds are produced’. The systematic study of the production, transmission, and reception of speech sounds is called Phonetics.

Every language uses some rules and regulations to convert various sounds into meaningful communications. A methodological interpretation of these sounds is known as phonology. Phonology consists of study of both phonemics and phonetics. The term phonemics refers to only significant sounds in contrast to phonetics that examines all sound patterns that human speech is capable of producing.

Anybody trying to explore nuances of a new language has to look for words in which by merely switching one alphabet or nominal sound bite the meaning can be altered. Take for instance replacing C in cat for B in bat. This process by which linguists try to identify a pair of words that sound exactly alike except one sound is called Minimal Pair Test. By this process a linguist isolates Allophones. Most linguists have a hard task. They start by identifying groups or combinations of sounds that are likely to have a meaning. These identified sound combinations are called Morphemes. There are Bound Morpheme, Free Morphemes and Allomorphs.

| **Phonemes:** The smallest classes of sound that make a difference in meaning. (Haviland, 1993) |
| **Phonemics:** The study of analysis of the systems of phonemes which occur in human languages. |
| **Phonetics:** The study of sound patterns in human speech. Phonetic analysis attempts measure, describe and represent symbolically all the sounds which speakers produce. It is contrasted with phonemics which is the study of significant sounds. |
| **Phonology:** The study of speech sounds including both phonemics and phonetics. (Seymour Smith, 1986) |
| **Allophones:** The identification of different sounds belonging to the same sound class, or phoneme. |
| **Morphemes:** In linguistics, the smallest unit of sound that carry a meaning. |
| **Bound Morpheme:** A sound that can occur in a language only in combination with other sounds, as s in English to signify plural. |
| **Free Morphemes:** Morphemes that can occur attached in a language; for example, dog and cat are free morphemes in English language. |
| **Allomorphs:** Variants of a single morpheme. (Following Haviland, 1993) |

With a preliminary understanding of some of the basic concepts used in linguistics, we now return to evolving a comprehension of what Grammar is all about. I am sure all of you in
your formative school years struggled with the right rules of grammar in all the three languages that you studied. The term Grammar was defined by Bloomfield in 1933. He defined it as the meaningful arrangements of forms in a language.

The notion of grammar was always linked to the formation of Syntax. Haviland calls it the rules and principles of phrase and sentence making. This process is known as identifying the syntactic units of the language, or the meaningful combination of morphemes in larger chains or strings. One way of doing it is by using a method called Frame substitution. (1993: 94).

We are all bound by our own learning experiences. It is in correspondence with those experiences that we attach meanings to utterances that we hear in other languages. This limits our ability to interpret and also at the same time facilitates our understanding of what others are saying. Some linguists argue that rules of grammar constrain free flow of expression of individuals. There are purists in all languages who claim that without a proper understanding of grammar, no language can be appropriately incorporated by individuals. For anthropologist grammar acquired more meaning than its utilitarian value for linguists. It became an instrument by which people and their spoken languages were classified in categories such as superior or inferior. We will return to this discussion in a later section of this lesson.

Grammar: The science dealing with the systematic rules of a language, its forms, inflections and syntax, and the art of using them correctly. (Webster Dictionary, 1986)

Grammar: The entire formal structure of a language consisting of all observations about morphemes and syntax. (Haviland, 1993)

At this stage of the lesson, I want to familiarize you with a list of 12 facts mooted by Fromkin and Rodman, about the functional aspects of linguistics:

- Where ever Humans exist, language exists.
- There are no “primitive” languages: all languages are equally complex.
- All languages change through time.
- The relationships between the sounds and meanings of spoken languages and between the gestures (signs) and meanings of sign languages are for the most part arbitrary.
- All human languages utilize a fine set of discrete sounds (or gestures) that are combined to form meaningful elements of words, which themselves form an infinite set of possible sentences.
- All grammars contain rules for the formation of words and sentences of a similar kind.
- Every spoken language includes discrete sound segments like p, n, or a, which can be defined by a finite set of sounds properties or features. Every spoken language has a class of vowels and a class of consonants.
- Similar grammatical categories (for example, noun, and verb) are found in all languages.
- There are semantic universals, such as “male”, “female”, “animate” or “human”, found in every language in the world.
- Every language has a way of referring to past time, negating, forming questions, issuing commands, and so on.
 Speakers of all languages are capable of producing and comprehending an infinite set of sentences.

Any normal child, born anywhere in the world, of any racial, geographical, social, or economic heritage, is capable of learning any language to which he or she is exposed. The difference we find among languages cannot be due to biological reasons.


Most languages in the world make definite use of other noises like crying, laughing, smiling etc. These expressions or signs are often as communicative if not more communicative than the spoken word. In linguistics, this usage is known as Paralanguage. The basis on which the impact generated by paralanguage mode of communication is determined is classified in terms of Voice qualities and vocalization. You must have noticed in your day to day life that one interprets a spoken sentence with the kind of assertion or indifference with which it is spoken. Often, meaning is conveyed by merely making a noise and that noise is often culturally meaningful. This is called Vocalization. When the voice is raised or lowered in the middle of a conversation, that is when the pitch of the sound is altered to convey an emphasis, and then it is identified as Voice quality.

| Paralanguage: The extra linguistic noises that accompany language, for example, those of crying or laughing. |
| Voice qualities: In paralanguage, the background characteristics of a speaker’s voice. |
| Vocalization: identifiable paralinguistic noises that are turned on and off at a perceivable and relatively short intervals. |
| Vocal Characterizers: In paralanguage, sound productions such as laughing and crying that humans “speak through.” |
| Vocal Qualifiers: In paralanguage, sound productions of brief duration that modify utterances in terms of intensity. |
| Vocal Segregates: In paralanguage, sound productions that are similar to the sounds of language, but do not appear in sequences that can properly be called words. |

(Following William Haviland 1993: 96-97).

**Sign language**

We are all aware of the fact that there is a section of our population that is not able to speak or hear sounds. These physically challenged people, commonly referred to as deaf and dumb, often use a sign language to communicate. There are various communities in the world that have evolved advanced methods of communication through signs. In certain communities sign language is used, when people opt to go into silent mode of communication. This may happen to mark a ritual occasion or a somber mood.

The term Sign language refers to a signed language performed in a three dimensional space, using hands, face, and body rather than speech that is understood through vision rather than through hearing. Typically, sign languages emerge among groups of deaf people who need to communicate in a language not dependent on sound. Some hearing groups, however
have also developed sign languages or signs systems of their own such as the signing used by Australian aboriginal women in mourning (Kendon, 1988) or Plains Indian signing (Farnell, 1995).


It is important to draw your attention to the fact that there is really no universal sign language. Different communities and different cultures use culture specific symbols to communicate with deaf people within their families and communities. Linguistic anthropologists from 1980’s onwards have started documenting different sign languages used by various cultural communities across the world to communicate with the deaf in the families, local schools and communities.
Another area of linguistic curiosity is the mode of communication through motion. This is often called as the **body language**. I am sure all of you must be familiar with the phrase in your day to day lives. In particular those of you, who happen to be ardent fans of cricket in India, must have heard commentators often say, “Oh! Sachin Tendulkar’s body language
does not look positive today”; or made similar references to various other players on the field. When one is feeling depressed, the shoulders tend to stoop, face has a grim expression and we tend convey through our bodies without actually saying it in so many words, how we are feeling on that particular day. To turn your back on someone in our cultural context tantamount to insulting that person; women are not expected to sit with their legs apart; men are not suppose to bow their heads in front of strangers or persons believed to be inferior in rank to them. In anthropological linguistics it is called Kinesics. In any field work, a fieldworker’s ability to observe and document the body language substantiates his data to a considerable extent. Ability to discern body language facilitates in rapport building, in maintaining required gender distance in ‘other cultures’.

**Kinesics:** It is a system of postures, facial expressions, and bodily motions that convey messages. These messages may be communicated directly, as in the case of gestures.

Illustration: --------------To discover the differences in how you greet a woman and how you greet a man, for instance, just observe yourself, paying attention to the following sorts of things: frequency and duration of eye contact, frequency and type of touch, -------physical distance maintained between bodies, how and whether you smile----------------, whether your body dips into a shadow courtesy or bow. That I have two repertories for handling introductions to people was vividly confirmed for me when a student introduced me to his friend, Pat, and I really could not tell what sex pat was. For a moment I was stopped cold, completely incapable of action. I felt myself helplessly caught between two paths-the one I would take if Pat were male. Of course the paralysis does not last. One is rescued by one's ingenuity and good will: one can invent a way to behave as one says “How do you do?” to a human being. But the habitual ways are not humans: they are one way for women and another for men. (Ref: Marilyn Frye, 1983: P.20: cf. Haviland, 1993)

The interest in the study of Kinesics is constantly on the rise since 1950s. Even when we speak different languages, most culture tends to share some kind of similarity in communicating through body language. We all want to cry, when we are in pain and laugh, to share our happiness. But there are some body gestures that may appear similar but convey different meanings in different cultural settings. Take for example in Sri Lanka, the head is nodded to convey ‘yes’ but a slow sideways movement is used to convey approval or affirmation of some action. In Greece, nodding conveys ‘yes’ but ‘no’ is conveyed by jerking the head back while lifting the face, raising the eyebrows and often closing the eyes.

**John B. Haviland** (2006:196) argues that “Gestures are clearly constructed from repertoires of bodily form and derived from both individual idiosyncrasy and cultural tradition”. In certain parlance gesture is often associated with a negative meaning. It is argued that to gesture at somebody is bad manners. In another context ‘gesture’ is also associated with only being a symbolic expression and not a serious intent to take the task that is being intended in the conversation. Given these colloquial constructions, for a long time linguistic anthropology did not pay adequate attention to incorporating language of ‘gestures’ in formal studies. It is now believed that gestures as integral to language studies as spoken words are. **Kendon** (1997:110-111) explaining this relationship says, “Speech and gesture are produced
together, and that they must therefore be regarded as two aspects of a single process------Speakers combine, as if in a single plan of action, both spoken and gestural expression”.

The origin of the English word “gesture” is to be found in Latin *gerere* that meant to ‘bear, carry, carry on, perform’ (via medieval Latin *gestura*), and its earliest usage accordingly meant ‘a manner of carrying the body: carriage, deportment”--a very broad notion which only later comes to be narrowed to “(a) movement of the body or limbs, now only as an expression of thought or feeling; the use of such movements as an expression of feeling or a rhetorical device,” and still later to the typical twentieth century meaning: [a]n action performed as a courtesy, formality, or symbol to indicate an intention or to evoke a response.


Association of intentionality attached to gesture has come under ethnographic scrutiny. It is argued that often the speaker is not aware of any intent that is attributed to the ‘gesture’ that may accompany any spoken word or syntax. I would like to conclude this section of the lesson by concurring with *Haviland’s* emphatic assertion that, “---gesture is part of language, in its full range of pragmatic functions, and that it is this as insistently deserving of anthropological attention as spoken words and the deeds they constitute”. (2006:219).

**Gensis of anthropological linguistics**

‘Linguistics without ethnography would fare as badly as ethnography would without the light thrown in it by language’.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1920:78)

Anthropological enquiry has always been inquisitive about other cultures. To learn about other cultures, it was imperative that the adventure travelers, and later field researchers become familiar with the spoken languages of other cultures and draw some inference from its understanding. The dilemma of anthropological linguist and ethnographer is summed up by Mithun (2006:123) as “search for order in chaos”. She identifies three broad frameworks, within which anthropological enquiry into linguistics has moved in:

♦ **Genetic**: untangling the origins of the languages and their relations to each other.

♦ **Typological**: investigating whether the languages vary without limits, or fall into major types, perhaps definable in terms of some basic features from which other characteristics follow.

♦ **Exploration of relations among language thought and culture**.

For a long time many researchers assumed that there was a common language used by mankind all over the globe. They argued that as civilizations developed and societies started acquiring numerous independent features, languages also became distinct from each other. (We have already elaborated on this aspect in the first section of this lesson citing similarity that appears in various languages of Indo-European origin in addressing “mother”). This school of thought believed that differences in languages were minor and in all probability, a
result of historical accidents. Many other linguistic anthropologists, on the other hand believe that it is these differences that constitute the subject matter of Linguistic Anthropology.

Duranti, a leading linguistic anthropologist, draws our attention to the notions of Linguistic Relativism and Functional Relativity:

One possible inference from these observations on linguistic diversity was that languages are arbitrary systems and one cannot predict how they will classify the world (linguistic relativism). Another inference was that languages would develop distinctions and categories that are needed to deal with the reality surrounding the people who speak them (linguistic functionalism). A third inference was that different conceptual systems represented in different languages would direct their speakers to pay attention to different aspects of reality, hence, language could condition thinking (linguistic relativity). (2001:11)

History of language diversification

Adaptation of grammar was considered, a significant step in the process of diversification of languages. It was essentially evolved for structuring spoken languages. Many would argue that this structuring became necessary as societies started differentiating individuals on the basis of knowledge that they have learnt and accumulated over the years. If we examine the caste system and all India pattern of Varna hierarchy, there is enough evidence to suggest that Brahmans initially attempted to restrict written language and repository of knowledge within a small select group of people. There is data available across the globe, demonstrating that superiority in language skills was often used as a tool to demonstrate superiority of a race. India has the unique distinction of having one of the earliest known grammars. Systematic studies of Panini’s Sanskrit grammar dates as far back as the fifth century B.C.E. Some references are available that shows Dionysios Thrax’s grammars of Greek that dates back to second or third century B.C.E. It has been pointed out by Jacobsen that the distinction of having the first grammar goes to Babylonians as far back as 600 or 500B.C.E. It is believed that Babylonians made a sincere attempt to preserve a vast body of literature available in the Sumerian language. Jacobsen writes that the Sumerian language was being replaced by Akkadian and to save its rudiments structures were created so the substance of the language sustains itself.

In ancient India succinct attempt was made to distinguish bhasa (spoken language) from Chnadas (the Vedic utterances). Linguists across the world believe that ancient Indian linguistics was instrumental in shaping the studies of various other languages in the world. Early contributions made by Sanskrit scholars namely Panini, Katyayana, Patanjali and many others helped in ‘the realization that language was infinite and could not be described by enumeration, but only with the help of “rules and exceptions”’ (Gary Blahnik, 1996). Many believe that it was religion and chanting of Mantras associated with rituals that made it necessary to evolve distinct linguist practices. It is also reasoned that linguists came to establish itself as a distinct discipline primarily because of demands made on languages by various religious traditions.
The early Indians faced a similar situation to that of the Babylonians, several centuries later (circa 1000 B.C.E.). The Indian linguistics drive is important because it has the same reason that drove most linguistic studies until the eighteenth century: religion. Specifically, the rituals for early Hinduism called for the recitation of words in the original Vedic. Therefore, as language changed, the early form (the **Samhitapatha** “continuous recitation”) was divided into the **Padapatha** (the “word for word recitation”), producing a full analysis on the phonemic level of a fixed body of text. Later linguistic efforts, notably **Panini**, expanded the **Pratisakhya Prtihka** linguistic analyses form Vedic utterances (*Chandas*) toward the spoken language (*bhasa*). **Panini, Katyayana, Patanjali** and others realized that language was infinite and could not be described by enumeration, but only with the help of “rules and exceptions” (*samanyavitesaval laksanam*). Throughout the centuries, Indian linguistics has been refined and simplified, and has inspired studies of other languages in similar rigorous ways ([J.F.Staal, “The origin and Development of Linguistics in India” in Hymes, 63-74]. In many ways the early Indians are the forefathers of modern linguistics, even before Panini.


Western linguistics

The western linguistics is inspired by the writings of Plato (427-347 B.C.E.). Researchers are of the opinion that Plato looked for the truth of language. Many others called as Rhetorics were at the same time looking for verbal skills that made communication effective. There was a hiatus between those who sought knowledge and those who simply focused on pragmatic mode of speech. This was the period that was defined by intense philosophical debates. The fundamental argument as approached by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) was that there is only one inner language. We differ only in a manner of speech as to its perception. The World View of all human beings all over the world is same.

Gary Blahnik (1996) argues that it was Aristotle’s work on taxonomies that guided Philology of Alexandria. It was instrumental in designing ‘Dionysios Thrax’s (first century B.C.E.) identification and elaboration of word classes and Apollonios Dyscolos’s second century C.E. study of Syntax. It is important to note here that most medieval grammatical studies were limited to the study of Latin. The Roman Catholic church and the Holy Roman Empire wanted to protect the original language and discouraged any innovations in languages. In India the Vedic literature encouraged puritanical use of Sanskrit but at the same time allowed other languages to flourish explaining the huge diversity of languages that we find in the country today. In contrast to the Vedic traditions that did not interfere with the perpetuation of other languages and dialects, Verberg notes that the responsibility of the
church was to “teach culture to barbarians as well as to preach faith to unbelievers”. The control of the church over the language declined with the revival of belles letters in circa 1100 CE. It was during this period that Modistae wrote Grammatica Speculativa. Many scholars of the western Linguistic thought regard it as a prescriptive Grammar. They also highlight its limitations. In their opinion this grammar fails to promote flexibility of languages. It denies:

- Modus essenti (reality/things)
- Modus intelligendi (intellect/thoughts)
- Modus significandi (language/signs)

Western linguistic tradition recognizes in addition to realistic grammar another theory called Nominalism. This theory recognized the importance of thought in the construction of language but regards intellect as spontaneous that may express itself lingually or through signs. Both these theories of Realism and Nominalism were critiqued as they ignored the importance of active Human agent. It was the recognition of this element that brought about a significant change in the western linguistics tradition.

The Humanism school revived the tradition of Rhetoric and insisted on speaking well. It also brought in the important nuance of Ethics (Erasmus, 1466-1536 C.E.). The most important contribution of this era was that Vernacular became acceptable as literary learned language.

The history of changes in the languages

Haviland (1993: 99) writes that “languages, like cultures have histories”. Historical Linguistics establishes antecedents of a language, compares its previous history with its modern day disposition, and establishes any relationships that may exist between various language families. Take for instance the efforts put in by Indian linguists to trace the history of Prakriti and Sanskrit or by western linguists the impact of Latin over early spoken Spanish or French. Historical Linguists have an interesting vocation. They try and trace the routes that certain language may have taken with the process of immigration across the world. The concept is also used to establish periods of contact and separation of groups of people moving from one region of the world to the other. Swadesh and Lees in early 1950s developed a technique called Glottochronology. The technique tries to date the divergence of different languages like Latin and Greek from a common source. Some of the changes that have taken place in a language are well know, often the causes remain unexplained. Most linguists would argue that a language grows because of people’s ability to innovate. New words, phrases and metaphors are continuously added by people in their languages. Sometimes foreign languages by non-native speakers are moulded to suit local dictions. An interesting acknowledgement of this phenomenon is acceptance of hinglish (Indianized version of spoken English).
**Language Family:** A group of languages that are ultimately descended from a single ancestral language.

**Language Groups:** Languages of a family that are more closely related to one another than they are to other languages of the same family.

**Linguistic Divergence:** The development of different languages from a single ancestral language.

**Glottochronology:** The concept was developed by Swadesh and Lees in the 1950’s. They tried to debate the divergence of related languages, such as Latin and Greek, from an earlier common language. The technique is based on the assumption that changes in a language’s core vocabulary—pronouns, lower numerals, and names for parts of the body and natural objects—change at a more or less constant rate. By applying a logarithmic formula to two related core vocabularies, one should be able to determine how many years the languages have been separated. Although not as precise as it might suggest, glottochronology provides useful way of estimating when languages have separated. (Following Haviland, 1993: 101)
Fig: 4.2 from Haviland

Language is regarded as an important means of establishing in-group loyalties. It is common knowledge that individuals belonging to different professional groups develop a professional lingo. Many times this language is not understood by others, for example medical professionals sharing names of infections not understood by common people. Similarly every other profession, name it anthropology, Psychology, Economics, Chemistry or Physics have their own distinct academic speech.

Another important area in this context is the domain of dialects. If we were to go by precise technical interpretations than all dialects are languages; the point of difference occurs when
speakers of these dialects are not able to follow at all what the other is saying. It is at this juncture that two dialects will develop as two different languages. A characteristic example of this would be the way Hindi is spoken in different parts of the country. From Uttar Pradesh to Bihar and Himachal the dialect has developed many variants.

Varying forms of language that are similar enough to be mutually intelligible are known as **Dialects**, and the study of dialects is a concern of **Sociolinguistics**. Technically, all dialects are languages—there is nothing partial or sublinguistic—and the point at which two different dialects become distinctly different languages is roughly the point at which speakers of one are almost totally unable to communicate with the speakers of the other. Boundaries may be psychological, geographical, social or economic and they are not always very clear. Frequently there is Buffer one, where features of both are found and understood, as between central and southern China. (William, A. Haviland, 1993:110).

We often define ethnic boundaries in our day to day interaction, on the basis of dialects that we use in day to day conversations. The divide between **Kanda** and **Tamil** in southern part of India and **Bengali** and **Assamese** in Assam explain ethno-linguistic character of these conflicts.

**Science, rationality and languages**

The most interesting chapter in the history of Linguistics was written, when rationality of science and principles of mathematics started defining structures in languages. The momentum was generated by “Galileo’s (1564-1641 C.E.) re-discovery of the mathematics behind mechanics, Hobbes (1588-1679 C.E.), in Ratio, determined that the purpose of words was to perform the calculus for the reasoning about reality. Therefore metaphors should be avoided because of their inconsistency. Hobbes is guilty of subsuming the natural words of natural languages to an artificial symbolism-mathematics. In truth, **mathematic symbolism is a subset of natural language, and not the inverse as Hobbes assumed.**” (Blahnik, 1996). The debate is substantiated in the works of **Descrates** (1596-1650 C.E.), **John Wilkins**, and **Locke** (1632-1704). Some of these scholars believed that there were two formats of the language. One was to explore reality used in mathematical terms; the other was to carry forward a discourse. It is important to draw the attention of the students to the fact that these propositions were challenged by empirical scientists. Anthropology essentially being a field science, having interacted with various communities that were not following these complex differences debated the relevance of these interpretations. These scholars believed that language was essentially a function of the soul. They also reasoned that calculus and algebra were merely other languages and many believed them to be more precise.

Leibniz (1646-1716 C.E.) developed the idea of mathematics of language using prime numbers and multiplication rather than addition and subtraction. It was found out that though the idea was easy to develop, it was almost impossible to use it in practice. Leibniz also developed the notion of a **universal Grammar**. The idea was developed on the lines that there is:

![Leibniz (1646-1716 C.E.) developed the idea of mathematics of language using prime numbers and multiplication rather than addition and subtraction. It was found out that though the idea was easy to develop, it was almost impossible to use it in practice. Leibniz also developed the notion of a universal Grammar. The idea was developed on the lines that there is:](image)
On this principle, he argued that “some languages are representationally poor (they are not good for scientific inquiry), they may still represent the truth but in a “distorted” way (much as something viewed at a 45 angle is a distorted image of the same object viewed at a 90 angle)”. This theory was later developed by Wolff (1679-1754 C.E.), who taught it in a relatively diluted manner to Bopp (1791-1867 C.E.). Bopp is considered “Founding father of Linguistic Proper”. (Details after Verburg, 202-209).

Language as we all understand is the most potent tool to communicate equality, disgust, affection or any other human emotion. It translates many of our concerns into effective realities. Rousseau (1712-1778) called it a musical quality - A quality that is measured by its social effects. It was Rousseau’s work that brought in Listener as an important participant in the process of dialogue generation. Function of the language was now critical to all its analysis. This was also the period when, the West was busy colonizing various parts of the world. The English, French, Dutch and Portuguese colonizers regarded native aboriginal languages as “uncouth, uncivilized, imperfect and perhaps most importantly, non-Christian” (Blahnik, 1996). It was during this period that the relationship between linguistics and Anthropology acquired tremendous importance. Various dominant voices in the discipline of anthropology and voices of reason in Linguistic studies were challenging the hegemony of the newly industrialized West. Also at the same time Linguists were trying to focus more and more on evolving explanations that can explain the meaning of a spoken sentence in precise terms. The descriptive Grammars that were in use often confused sentences and implied meanings. To overcome some of these difficulties Noam Chomsky (1957) promoted a method of analysis called Transformational –Generative Grammar. Chomsky propounded these ideas in a book entitled Syntactic Structures written in 1957.

TRANSFORMATIONAL –GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

The concept is given by Noam Chomsky in his book Syntactic Structure. According to him language is more than a surface phenomenon that is more than sounds, words and word order. If we analyze all the languages, stage by stage, in a systematic manner, we find that all languages share a limited set of principles. Human beings are endowed with the unique capacity to learn any language at any stage of their lives. Chomsky is of the opinion that our Brain has a Blue print, a kind of a chip that is genetically transmitted and comprises of a basic linguistic plan for acquiring languages. This plan is called by Chomsky as the Universal Grammar. The argument is that when young infants start learning languages they already have a formative idea of how sounds are to be interpreted. When one is being trained in one’s native language, as a child you learn to accept some parts that the Blueprint is endorsing and reject others.

In Chomsky’s analysis, languages have two levels—Deep structure and Surface Structure.

Deep Structure: Formation of a thought at the mental level in the speaker’s mind.

Surface Structure: The actual speech event that the hearer absorbs and converts into his own deep structure.

Chomsky also distinguishes between a native speaker’s competence and Performance.
Competence: What Native speakers must and do know about their language in order to speak and understand it.

Performance: What people actually say: the use of speech in social situations?


It is interesting to read what Kottak (1991:277) has to say in support to Chomsky’s theory: The fact that children everywhere begin to speak at about the same age buttresses Chomsky’s theory. Furthermore, people master features of language at similar rates. There are universals in language accusation, for example such as improper generalizations (foot, foots, hit, hitted), which are eventually corrected. This illustrates the process by which children experiment with linguistic rules, accepting and refining some while rejecting others.

We are familiar with the kind of common pronunciation and grammatical errors that we make, in day to day use of not only other languages but also in the use of our mother tongue.
Many of us may have been butt of many jokes for not speaking or writing the language in its pure form. It is important for you to comprehend that language is first and foremost the most important means of communication. Simply speaking –what you say and what the listener or hearer interprets. The entire theory of communication is focused on developing cognitive skills. Anthropologists are different from the linguists as they try and understand these skills in their local and cultural contexts. They go beyond simple meanings or historical antecedents. They compare languages and dialects from different cultures. They map them for their variations. Some of them in the process may attempt to draw some generalizations as to how some of the contents, words, phrases, expressions may have traveled from one culture to another. As Chomsky wrote, languages may seem to differ hugely at the surface level, but at the level of deep structures most languages are similar. Most languages tend to follow similar organizational principles. However, there are other linguist scholars who differ from Chomsky’s perceptions. They argue that ‘different languages produce different thought processes’.

**Culture, language, knowledge and thought**

Taking a position that is different from Noam Chomsky, Edward Sapir (1949:162) wrote:

> Human Beings do not live in the objective world alone----- but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society------- The fact ----is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.

Categories of cognition according to Sapir’s view are largely determined by the terms of reference that we attach to people with whom we interact. Kinship Terminology is often used as an example to explain this. It is believed that if the brothers of father are addressed by the same term that is used to address father (Father’s elder brother is called *Bade baba*, father is addressed as *Baba* and father’s younger brother is called *Chotae baba*) then the same kind of respect is shown to all of them.

### THE SAPIR- WHORF HYPOTHESIS

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis also known as the theory of **linguistic relativism** and was developed by Edward Sapir (1884-1934) along with Benjamin Whorf. It was influenced by the work of Franz Boas, who was working on the theory of cultural relativism. Sapir and Whorf were also influenced by the dominant trends in philosophy and linguistics.

The Hypothesis believes that different languages produce different ways of thinking.

Illustration: The third person singular pronouns of English (*he, she; him, her; his, hers*) distinguish gender, whereas those of the Palaung, a small tribe in Burma, do not (Burling 1970). Implying that English speaking people will pay more attention to gender difference than the tribal Palaung of Burma.
The English language makes a clear distinction between past, present and future. The pueblo people living in the South West America speaking Hopi language do not distinguish between past present and future. Instead they distinguish between events that exist, or have existed. According to Whorf this difference gives people speaking Hopi and English different perceptions of time and reality. (Cf. Kottak, 1991:278).

Two important questions are posed by Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:

Are concepts of time, space and matter given in substantially the same form by experience to all people, or are they in part conditioned by the structure of particular languages?

Are there correspondences between linguistic patterns and cultural behavioural norms? (Sareena Nanda, 1991: 120).

In response to both these questions Sareena Nanda contends that “most anthropologists would probably give a qualified yes to both questions, although we have little actual research to document these answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1 Phonetic vowel symbols (Sapir System)*</th>
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<tr>
<td>i</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Fr. fini)</td>
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<td>(Eng. bit)</td>
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<td>(Fr. été)</td>
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<td>(Eng. men)</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>(Eng. mon)</td>
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*The symbol ə is used for an “indeterminate” vowel.  

Figure: Table 4.1 from Haviland 1993, P.93

There are number of recent publications that are not comfortable with the Sapir Whorf hypothesis. According to the Whorf’s hypothesis language is essential for developing thought processes. Those critiquing it would argue, that if that is the case then ‘how do you explain pre-linguistic thought of babies and where language came from. Second, even if you weaken the claim to that language only influences our world view, and then a common counter-argument is that languages are translatable, with rare cases of poetry and humour. Third, there are studies that go a good way to disproving Sapir-Whorf, like Osgood’s common meaning study found that languages share a common meaning system.’ (Keith, [http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/27.5.2002](http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/27.5.2002)).
Following development course of linguistic anthropology

Now that you have learnt the importance of languages to understand ethnography, a fact pointed out by Malinowski as early as 1920, I want to take you on a short journey to demonstrate, how the disciplines of linguistics and anthropology, maintained an emotive and at times indifferent relationship with each other. Language always remained central to the school of Cultural Anthropology that flourished in the United States of America. The interest in Anthropological Linguistics in USA started with Franz Boas and was nurtured with academic reverence by Edward Sapir. It traveled through various schools among them the prominent were- Glottochronology, Information Theory and found a forceful voice in Chomsky’s Transformational Generative Grammar. The relevance of language to culture and ethnography is recognized in cultural anthropology in the USA till today.


It would be interesting to take a flash back into how linguistic anthropology came to establish itself as an independent discipline in the USA. Genesis of almost all disciplines is rooted in man’s desire to explore and I have said this repeatedly in the course of this lesson. When European travelers reached North America, they realized that the variety of languages spoken by various communities in North America were distinct from the English that they spoke. Mithun (2006) draws our attention to historical details, suggesting that “probably the earliest written record of any North American language is a wordlist recorded from an Iroquoian group living on the St. Lawrence River near present Quebec city” (121). After that various other travelers who came from various European countries continued to interact with numerous other native north American groups for nearly three centuries. Anthropologists believe that there are still some groups in California that have remained strangers to the outside world. In the process more than 300 spoken languages have been recorded in the course of these explorations. It is also believed that many languages have disappeared without a trace.

One of the significant contributions of linguistic anthropology is its efforts to record these languages; many of which are on the verge of extinction. Linguistic anthropologists in the past were handicapped for want of sophisticated instruments for recording oral dialects. They were earlier dependent only on Paper and pen and as Boas pointed out it was difficult to capture nuances of any spoken dialect fully on a piece of paper. We now have more sophisticated instruments like tape-recorders, video cameras, and computers to maintain a more precise account of these languages. It is also important to note that numerous attempts were made in America to preserve some of these records. Thomas Jefferson in 1787 made extraordinary effort to collate vocabularies of these different languages. It is unfortunate that most of these records were destroyed. Special mention has to be made of the endeavors by Boston lawyer John Pickering, who devised a “phonetic alphabet so that scribes might be better equipped to cope with unfamiliar sounds in a consistent way” (Mithun, 2006:122). Genetic classification of the languages of North America was pursued by Major John Wesley Powell. Powell was also instrumental in establishing the Bureau of Ethnology in 1879 that subsequently came to be known as the Bureau of American Ethnology. One of the first
projects carried out by this institution resulted in an exhaustive study of Indian Linguistic families of America North of Mexico. This study resulted in a classification of these languages into fifty families. This study has become some kind of standard. Most other studies on language families in North America try to improve upon this classification. Some attempts are also on in America to reconstruct some ancestral languages in order to discover the relationship between language and culture.

**Linguistic tradition in British anthropology**

British anthropology commonly referred to as **Social Anthropology**, irrespective of Malinowski’s early observations failed to incorporate detailed linguistic studies in the broader traditions of the discipline. Efforts made by Milner (1954) and Whiteley (1966) to put linguistic theory in perspective in anthropological writings, hardly had any takers. The general opinion in British anthropology is that the structure-function school was far too obsessed with the scientific validity of its hypothesis that it failed to see what was happening in the discipline in other parts of the world. **Edwin Ardner’s** (1971: X) following observations reveal this indifference in a considerable manner:

British Social anthropologists have been ill at ease with language ever since the nineteenth century beginnings. The early developments in comparative philology were, it is true, in many ways a hindrance rather than a help to theoretical development, encouraging as they did some of the less fruitful speculations on race and primitive origins. At Oxford the German Max Muller tried to express before his time, although in a form subsequently much criticized (Evans Pritchard, 1965: 20-23), some of the links between language and myth, which were not explored again in this country with official approval for another half century. The philological movement of the 1870s under Brugmann and his colleagues seemed to make no impact. As far as British Anthropology was concerned, the Neogrammarians lived and died unnoted. Ferdinand de Saussure lectured in the first decade of this century on topics such as synchrony and diachrony, and subsequently remained uncited by anthropologists whose treatment of these subjects was less skillful. Malinowski taught his pupils to ‘learn the language’, and it’s a tribute that many so successfully made the attempt with what seems in retrospect so relatively little awareness of the main advances in descriptive linguistics in the twenties and thirties.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1884-1934) is regarded as the founder of the structuralist approach to linguistics. He made contributions to philology at an early age. He taught Sanskrit in Paris from 1881 to 1891. He is chiefly known for his lectures on linguistics given at the University of Geneva 1906-11. His lectures were compiled by his students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye after his death. Saussure’s ideas were socio-linguistic rather than purely linguistic. He made a distinction between *la langue* and *la parole* is susceptible of acoustic measurement, or tape-recording, and of other physical tests. *La langue* is not, because this is a system abstracted from, and in turn superimposed upon, *la parole*. (Smith, 1986, Ardner, 1971)

It may also be contended that British Anthropology’s indifference to linguistic studies and its obsession with scientific understanding of societies only through structure-functional school,
was often challenged by French intellectual traditions. As Ardner puts it, “French linguists have generally retained a ‘sociological’ viewpoint since Saussure’s day”. Saussure as mentioned already had worked systematically to demonstrate that historical studies of languages were not the only course for understanding its complexities. The Structural-functional approach that dominated British anthropology for a long time, also moved away from historical studies and obsession with origin of society to examine systems and its functions. But Saussure was far more perceptive in his readings of Synchronic and Diachronic views.

**Linguistic Anthropology in India**

Anthropology was brought to India by the British administrators. Initially it was introduced to help colonial masters to understand local cultures and local traditions to facilitate administrating far flung areas in this hugely diverse country.

Most departments of Anthropology in India neither have trained linguists nor are they teaching basics of linguistic anthropology. The revised curriculum for under-graduate and post-graduate teaching of Anthropology in India, prescribed by UGC has now made teaching of Linguistic Anthropology as core subject.

India’s linguistic diversity is amazing. If North-American linguists were excited about the existence of 300 recorded languages, we have 1652 spoken languages as per the 1961 census. Out of these 1549 are regarded as indigenous to India. The linguistic record shows that out of 1549 languages, about 573 covered nearly 99% of India’s entire population. Historically linguists have differed on criteria for identifying a language. George Grierson, in the linguistic survey conducted by him identified 544 dialects and 179 major languages. India’s constitution under the 8th schedule of the constitution initially recognized 15 national languages. These accounted for 387 spoken dialects, purportedly covering more than 95% of country’s total population. In 1956, eight major languages, namely Assamese, Bengali, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Telgu and Tamil were given independent status and were recognized as the official state language of the respective states. By 1966, Gujarati, Marathi and Punjabi also acquired independent language status and specific state recognition. There were five Hindi speaking states. As a consequence of this principle of recognition and reorganization, by 1966, barring Sanskrit, Urdu and Sindhi all the fifteen recognized languages by the constitution were formally accepted as the official state languages. In the formative years of our independence, there were linguistic tensions in the country because of what is believed to be a great divide between the Indo-Aryan North India and Dravidian speaking Southern India. (for details refer to shalina Mehta (2002) IGNOU lesson for BA -2nd year students of sociology)

**TRIBAL LANGUAGES IN INDIA**

Tribals in India show a great deal of variation. ‘Our humanity lies just as much in recognizing the marvel and wonder the truth of its variety as in acknowledging its unity’ (Miri 1988). In the context and of cultural and linguistic identity in the Indian setup, the occupational pursuits of hunting and gathering can be associated with tribal languages, and of subsistence farming with non-tribal, rural vernaculars or dialects (Mohan 1986). Illich’s (1981) characterization of ‘vernacular economy’ and ‘capitalized language’ shows a strong correlation between language loyalty and socio-economic status. The linguistic
transition is closely associated with socio-economic transition; ‘the settled village farmer in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Bengal and Orissa often has a nomadic forest-tribal ancestry, recent or remote: thus in such areas ‘tribal’ is less or racial or ethnic category than a statement of present day language loyalty and socio-economic life-style’ (Mohan op.cit).

MOST OF THE TRIBAL POPULATIONS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE North-east, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadeep, live in the midst of sweeping non-tribal population. During the course of history, though nearly half of the tribal societies still maintain a distinct language as a mark of their identity (49 per cent in 1971, reduced to 42 percent in 1981), a large section of them tend to switch over to the surrounding non-tribal languages as their mother tongue or retain both languages (ancestral and non-tribal) in home environments, a characteristic feature of plurilingual India (Kubchandani 1983).

About 12 percent tribals retain certain hybrid varieties, with the indo-Aryan or Dravidian base (Lamani, Banjari, Sadri, Khortha, Dangi, Bhatri, Vadari, and Yerkula) as their mother tongue.

The 1971 and 1981 census list 81 tribal languages whose speech are over ten thousand each: 54 languages of Tibeto-Burman family (4.3 million speakers in 1981). 14 belonging to Austric family (7.9 million). 11 to Dravidian (4.6 million), and two to Indo-Aryan (5.0 million) families.

A large section of tribals representing Austric, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages are spread throughout the central belt of the country, interspersed with vast non-tribal populations. Hence tribal languages in this area are charged with minimum functional load (restricted largely to the home environment) and serving primarily as a mark of group identity. In everyday life activities these languages are, thus, open to the pressures of assimilation from major regional languages.

On the other hand, tribals representing Tibeto-Burman languages, though constituting a smaller section of the total tribal population (roughly eight percent), exclusively dominate in most parts of the North-east region (along with Khasi, an Austric language).

Tribal languages of Tibeto-Burman family comprise of eight groups: Among them 9 languages of the Bodo sub-family (Bodo, Garo, Tripuri, Mikir, Rabha, Dimasa, Lalung, Deori, and Koch) constitute the largest group, spoken by over half of the tribal population spread in the brahmaputra valley, N.Cachar Hills in Assam, Meghalya and Tripura. Languages belonging to other groups are spoken in smaller number of populations: 24 languages of Naga group (19 percent) in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Northern Assam (12 percent): 9 languages of Bhotia group (two percent) and 14 languages of Himalayan group (2 percent) are spoken by tribal extending to the central and western sub-Himalayan range (Sikkim, W.Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh).

In contrast to the distinct identity of many literary languages in the country (such as Bengali, Tamil, Marathi), most of the Tribal languages represent oral cultures and are characterized by the flexibility of its identity.

The vast population of the North-central India, represented by Hindi, Urdu, Panjabi, Pahari and other vernaculars (virtually half of the country’s total population), is also characterized by such fluid language boundaries, defined on the basis of
I have cited this case-study of diversity in India’s Tribal languages to demonstrate our heritage of linguistic diversity and richness of its traditions. Once, you sensitize yourself, to differences in nuances of spoken languages, as a linguistic anthropologist, you will soon be looking for similarities and differences in spoken words and its implied meanings. You will also realize how languages are common recourse to assertions of differences. You will also learn and observe that though there is commonality in speech; individuals evolve their own peculiar styles to make this most important medium of communication, in certain ways individualistic.

**Language and inequality**

Ethnographic writings and field researches pursued by anthropologists for years have brought to the fore the contrasting positions that languages provide to people and communities to which they belong. Blacks or other ethnic minorities in America are considered by many as inferior as they do not speak English the way Anglo-American do. In our own country, language divide is rampant. We tried to resolve some of the problems by introducing the three language formula, in our school system and for administrative functions. We have, as a young nation faced language riots after the reorganization of the states on the basis of a linguistic affinity. In an ironical way, the recent information revolution that India experienced, we have also shown to the world, how flexibility in language policy can facilitate growth of a nation. We adopted Hindi as our national language, allowed regional language to flourish and have official state languages and in a secular way promoted advantage of learning English, the language that the colonial rulers left behind.

Our education system created a divide in which economically advanced sections of the population sent their children to English medium schools and subsequently had access to quality education and window to better job opportunities. The government sponsored education system promoted English as a subject, initially after five years of primary schooling. It is important to acknowledge that irrespective of a policy of protective discrimination, state’s inability to provide equality in terms of quality education in a language that was identified with power, privilege and economic advantages, a considerable section of India’s population remained backward and deprived.

The example cited above endorses the importance that Linguistic anthropologists have started attaching to the study of language and social inequality, in particular from 1960’s onwards. It was William Labov’s (1972) study of Black English that brought to the fore anomalies that perception of language inequalities promoted.
Civil Rights issues in communities and schools that centered around equality for blacks created awareness that the English being spoken by Black children was being treated as not equal to that of white children. Their non-standard dialects were conceptualized as broken, corrupted versions of Standard English and blamed for the children’s failure to participate and thrive in schools. Labov famously argued for the rule-governedness and systematricity of Black English and for the inappropriateness of thinking of the dialect as broken or corrupted. But he also argued that the typical classroom was not a comfortable place for black children, because they interacted with white teachers with whom they were unfamiliar at best in ways of speaking, and about topics that were also unfamiliar. He illustrated the facility with language of black children when they given opportunities to interact with black interviewers in black community contexts. (cf. Susan U.Philips, 2006: 476-77).

Similar arguments are positioned by linguists and anthropologists in the context of imparting primary education to various deprived sections of tribal and other socially marginalized communities in India. It is being repeatedly asserted that these populations need to be given basics in their local dialects and slowly other languages need to be introduced.

Language often defines positions not only in personal interactive relations but also in terms of appreciation and recognition on the larger world platform. Many anthropologists believe that ‘proper language’ is an asset that facilitates wealth, position and power in society. (Gal, 1989, Kottak, 1991). Pierre Bourdieu (1982, 1984-cf Kottak, 1991) a leading French anthropologist, is of the opinion that language acts as a symbolic capital. It enhances one’s social status, provides better economic opportunities and identifies individuals with established institutions in the society. A student, who attended a Sanskrit Vidya peeth or a reputed Hindi speaking school in India today will not command the same kind of respect and job opportunities that a pass out of St.Stephan’s or Doon school would normally do. This happens because language of the market and not of the masses holds the symbolic capital.

There is no denying the fact that hegemony of a dominant language destroys creativity in smaller regional languages. This happens for want of readership and due to lack of promotional avenues. Those writing and speaking in English language have a distinct advantage over those writing and speaking only their native languages. Anthropologists have in their empirical researches documented these inequalities and promoted viable models that encourage a social system to provide equal opportunities to everybody.

Gender and language differentiation

You are familiar with the notion of gender- the concept of feminine and masculine in languages. In addition to performing the role of identifying sexes, language is also instrumental in assigning inferior or superior position to men and women in society. Take a simple example, men have some kind of unstated approval to abuse or to use certain abusive words in their day to day speech in certain cultures; whereas, abusive speech is related only to women of low esteem in society, or those who are engaged in ‘immoral’ professions. There is a near universal acknowledgement of different language use rules for men and
women. Feminist scholars have consistently pointed out these differences, particularly in those societies that are rooted in patriarchy traditions.

Language is implicated in the feminist critique in several ways. First there is the idea that the semantic structure of English derogates women, and renders them invisible, among other things. Examples of these ideas include the proliferation of terms that disparaged women sexually, such as “whore” and “bitch”, that diminuized them, as in “baby”, “chickie”, and “cuttie”, and that rendered them invisible, as in the use of the pronouns “he”, “him”, and “his” to refer to both men and women.

Second there is the idea that Women’s language style is perceived as powerless compared to the powerful language of men. Lakoff characterized women’s language as more polite, and her work opened up the development of politeness theory more generally (Brown and Levinson 1987), and the development of comparative inquiry on whether women’s language is cross-linguistically more polite than men’s. Powerlessness means not being attended to, and accordingly involved a kind of silencing of women (Gal 1991).


Language is also responsible for defining opportunities for political participation for women. It demarcates public and private domains. Women are told and are socialized from early childhood to remain confined to household activities. In a democratic system, they have the right to vote but in matters of choice, they are expected to have no independent speech. They must vote, only as per the choices made by the men in the household. Susan Philips (2006:481) endorsing this argument says, “feminist anthropological research and research in ethnography of communication also has given rise to the idea that a gendered social organization of speech entails the exclusion of women from speech events and speech genres in public domains, as opposed to private domains of language use”. These arguments are purported by (Keenan 1974; Sherzer 1987; Briggs 1992).

The notion of language differentiation is also often critiqued by various other anthropologists and linguists. They say that there is not enough evidence to justify this differentiation. Philips (2006:482) argues in defense of domain differentiation model, reasoning that “in this model of domain differentiation women certainly speak in private, in the household. But by being denied access to the public sphere, they are denied larger audiences for their words and views, and denied access to forms of talk or speech genres that carry greater prestige or weight in society”. This would imply that women are not trained in languages of public domain and it is often argued that they do not participate in public domain as their knowledge field is relatively restricted.

The research on language and gender inequality has played an important role in developing the concept of ideology in language related research by making the negative evaluation of women’s language and speech a central factor in their silencing. Silencing through inattention to women’s speech because it was perceived as powerless, silencing through the deployment of conversational strategies in taking turns at talk that discourage women’s participation, and silencing through
the exclusion of women’s speech in public domains, events and genres all have been justified by language ideologies about men’s and women’s speech that negatively evaluated women’s contributions. (Susan U. Philips: 2006: 483)

Language and identity

In the beginning of this lesson, I mentioned that to form a basic understanding of Linguistic Anthropology, it is important to understand structures that constitute languages, their history and origin, theories that are promulgated to explain linguistic diversity, anthropology’s primary concern with socio-linguistics, notions of inequality generated by languages both in terms of classes and gender and finally the important issue that continues to trouble most pluri-lingual societies—the question of language and identity. I will be discussing this relationship very briefly, as there is another lesson in your course which deals in detail with various issues of identity.

All of you are very proud of your mother-tongue. It is important to us, as that is the language in which most of us feel at home. We are comfortable talking in it and can relate easily to all those who speak the same language. This also results in building bonds between people speaking the same language. It is also seen that people speaking the same language often have regional affinities. This gives a sense of belonging that is identified as ‘identity’. Linguistic Identity would thus be defined as a sense of belonging shared by people speaking the same language. We have in the text of this lesson talked about post-independent India being reorganized on the basis of principle of linguistic affinity. Linguistic Anthropology is said to be a study of relationship between language and identity.

LANGUAGE AND Identity

In many ways, the study of linguistic anthropology is the study of language and identity. The field’s concern with the linguistic production of culture entails a concern with the variety of culturally specific subject positions that speakers enact through language. Thus classic anthropological studies of performance and ritual, of socialization and status, describe not merely on the term identity itself until relatively recently, the concept has now taken a central position in linguistic anthropology, serving less as the background for other kinds of investigation and more as a topic meriting study in its own right. This move is important because among the many symbolic resources available for the cultural production of identity, language is the most flexible and pervasive. The fact that so much scholarship on identity in socio-cultural anthropology draws on linguistic evidence—such as life stories, narratives, interviews, humor, oral traditions, literacy practices, and more recently media discourses—attests to the crucial if often unacknowledged role language plays in the formation of cultural subjectivities.

I must emphasize here that the principle of re-organization of states on the basis of linguistic affinity is not really a post-independent phenomenon. There is historical evidence to suggest that political boundaries often defined in addition to geographical contiguity, linguistic and cultural affinity. People have always had special association with their nativity and mother tongue. Social and cultural anthropologists in their field researches have often pointed to these bonding.

While reading through this lesson, you may have realized that *Linguistic Anthropology* is as fascinating as learning of different languages is to most of us. Every time we enroll ourselves to learn a language, we have this unexplored desire to know more about people and cultures who speak that language. It is this that constitutes the essence of linguistic anthropology.

**Summary**

Study of linguistics is integral and essential to the understanding of anthropology. The discipline of anthropology has its foundations in researching other communities. To understand other communities it is imperative that we evolve a fundamental understanding of modes of communication used by those communities. Anthropological linguistics goes beyond the study of morphemes, phonemes, syntax and Grammar. It also attempts to unlock the mysteries of gestures, utterances, body movements (kinesics) and other accompanying cultural attributes.

Anthropology’s contribution in exploring relationship between language and culture is of great significance. Linguistic anthropology explores socio-linguistics, historical linguistics, and defines anthropology’s formative concern of examining diversity in languages and meaning systems. It affirms that no language is inferior or superior, nor individuals speaking languages in their own stylistic manner are inferior or superior to each other. It recognizes the fact of linguistic inequality, while condemning its practice for assigning positions to people. It establishes the importance of language in the identity formations.

**Suggested readings**


- It traces evolution of languages through history.


- The book is an introduction to the formative understanding of relations between language and society.

• A collection of essays on Linguistic Anthropology that provides a comprehensive account of various dimensions and issues important for the understanding of Linguistic anthropology.

• The book essentially talks about how individuals use language to establish social identities.

• A detailed account of development of Linguistic Anthropology.

• Lesson discusses issues relating to linguistic ethnicity in India.

• Edited volume comprising of a section that deals with various linguistic Issues confronted by some of India’s Tribal communities.

**REFERENCES**


Some important details to remember
Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913) is regarded as the founder of the **structuralist approach** to Linguistics.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was propounded by Edward Sapir (1931) and Benjamin Whorf (1956). Haviland (1993) prefers to term it as the Whorfian Hypothesis. The hypothesis states that language, by providing habitual grooves of expression, predisposes people to see the world in a certain way and so guides their thinking and behaviour.

**Focal Vocabulary** comprises of specialized set of terms and distinctions that are particularly important to certain groups. For example the Eskimo’s have several distinct terms for different types of snow but English language has only one expression for snow. **Core Vocabulary** refers to pronouns, lower numerals, and names for body parts and natural objects in any language.

**Deep Structure** In transformational Grammar refers to those sentences that are formed at the level of mental construct, whereas **Surface Structure** is the actual message that is communicated from the speaker to the hearer.

**Linguistic Relativity** There is no fundamental difference in the qualitative ability of any language to communicate and all languages are equally effective in any system of communication.

**Constitutional provisions for languages in India:** Article 343, declares Hindi as ‘the official language of the Union. Article 345 provides for the states to enact their own official language; ‘that is to be used for all or any of the official purposes’ of the states. Schedule 8 of the constitution governs language status.