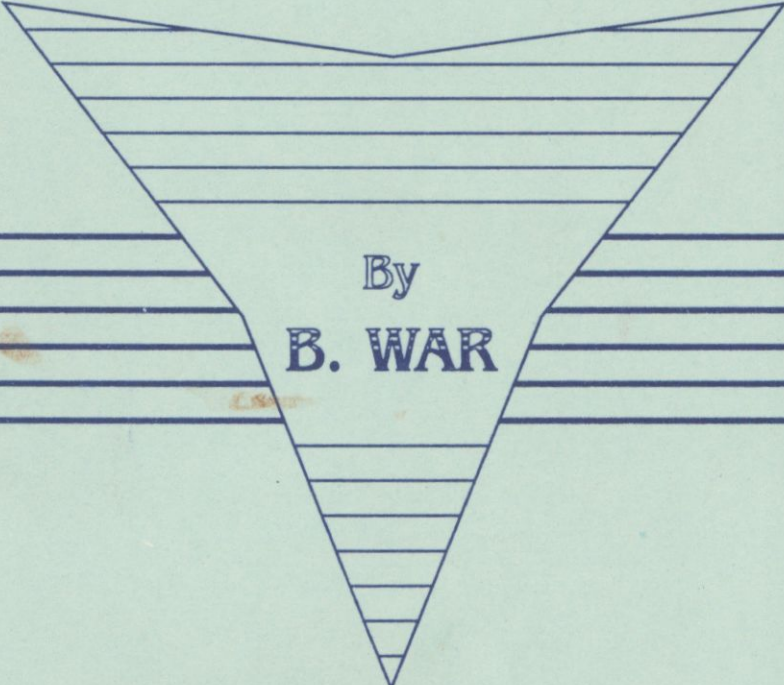


AN
INTRODUCTION
TO
LINGUISTICS



By
B. WAR

Preface

AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS

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Preface

Ever since I started teaching linguistics in Khasi Department of the North-Eastern Hill University, I have noted a deep-felt need for an introductory text book on the subject. My students since 1983 have urged me time and again to write an easy-to-read book on General Linguistics in order to help them prepare for more specialized courses in Linguistics. However, it is only in 1996 that I seriously started collecting materials and writing down important aspects of this study. I have purposely organised the chapters of the book in accordance with the topics designed for M.A. (Course I), Khasi Department, so that students will have a proper foundation in the subject. It is my earnest hope that this book will enable them to realize the varied fields of linguistics and will, therefore, encourage them to investigate the different aspects of the Khasi language. The scope is vast and wide open for scholars who, I hope, will find the subject as fascinating and fulfilling as it has been for me.

Dated Shillong

(B. War)

The 30th January 1997

1. David Crystal. 1969. *What is Linguistics* p. 1-9
2. David Crystal. 1969. *ibid.* p.28

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CHAPTER III

Origin and Development of Linguistics

The previous chapter has dealt at some length on the study of language before the emergence of linguistics as a discipline for it is only in the last quarter of the eighteenth century that linguistics first made its appearance. This is dated to an important linguistic event that took place in 1786. Sir William Jones, a British civil servant working as a judge of a high court in India presented a paper in that year at the Royal Asiatic Society in Calcutta which brought out the systematic similarities and morphological correspondences of European languages such as Latin and Greek to the classical language of India, namely, Sanskrit. Jones was able to show that these similarities were not accidental but were a clear indication of the genetic relationship between these languages. For example, the numeral systems of these languages show this relationship between them :

Latin	Greek	Sanskrit	
unus	heis	ekas	'one'
duo	duō	dva	'two'
tres	treis	trayas	'three'
quattuor	téttares	eatvaras	'four'
quinque	pante	pañca	'five'
sex	heks	ṣaṭ	'six'
septem	heptá	sapta	'seven'
octo	októ	aṣṭa	'eight'
novem	ennea	ṇava	'nine'
decem	déka	daśa	'ten'

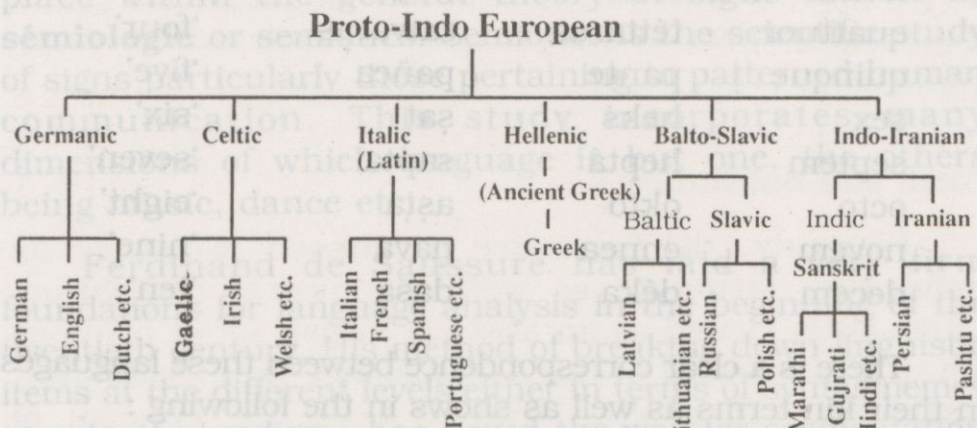
There is a clear correspondence between these languages in their kin terms as well as shows in the following :

Latin	Greek	Sanskrit	
pater	pāter	pitar	'father'
frater	phrāter	bhratar	'brother'

Jones' findings made a very deep impact upon the study of language and many scholars were provoked into conducting research which would show the way certain languages are descended from a common ancestor language. Nevertheless, it was not always possible for scholars to examine documented records in order to arrive at any conclusion regarding the genealogical relationship of languages. Their linguistic exploration, therefore led them into a new type of linguistic investigation, that is, reconstructing a proto-language by comparing existing features of related languages. Both methods of linguistic study are part of what is now known as historical linguistics, a study which "seeks to investigate and describe the way in which languages change or maintain their structure during the course of time".²⁵ Historical linguistics dominated the discipline of linguistics well into the nineteenth century. That century, however, can be divided into three phases where linguistic study is concerned.

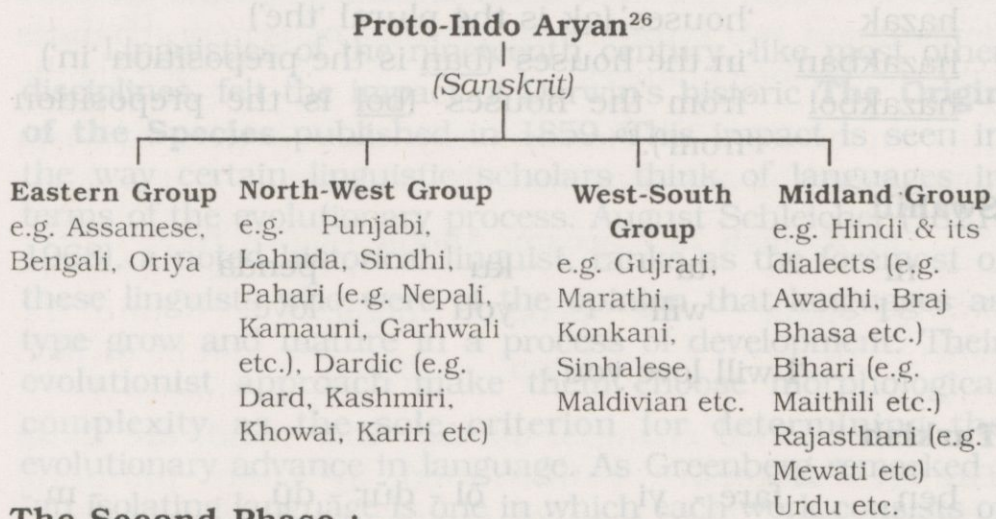
The First Phase :

The first phase of the century was taken up by intense research into the genealogical relationship of languages which culminated in the family tree of many related European and Asian languages. Scholars reconstructed the ancestor language, or more correctly, the proto-language, of these languages which were grouped under the Indo-European language family. The following diagram shows the languages descended from this family:



25. Theodora Bynon. 1977. *Historical Linguistics* p.1

In the above diagram, the horizontal dimension represents 'space' whereas the vertical dimension represents 'time'. It has also to be noted here that the above diagram does not present an exhaustive list of the languages that fall within this family. For example, the Indic or more commonly known Indo-Aryan group of languages can be shown in the following diagram :



The Second Phase :

The second phase of the nineteenth century turns to the typological classification of languages. Scholars working on this, attempt to show how different types of languages represent different stages of language development. These scholars made a very valuable contribution to linguistic study when they presented a typological classification of their languages based on their morphological structures. They propounded that the world's languages belong to one of the following three types :

(a) Isolating or analytic type of languages of which Chinese is seen as an example. Chinese is a monosyllabic, root-isolating language where tone is a very important feature as the following examples show :

-	shī	'to lose'	(high, even tone)
/	shí	'ten'	(rising tone)
\	shǐ	'history'	(falling then sharply rising tone)
\	shì	'city'	(falling tone). ²⁷

26. George Cardona. 1974. "The Indo-Aryan Language" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition., Vol. 9. p.439-50.

27. Robert Lord. 1996. *Comparative Linguistics* p.36

(b) Agglutinative or affixing type of language where words are seen as 'a mechanical combination of parts (base, prefixes and suffixes).'²⁸ Hungarian, Swahili and Turkish are good examples of this type of language :

Hungarian

<u>haz</u>	'house'
<u>hazak</u>	'houses' (<u>ak</u> is the plural 'the')
<u>hazakban</u>	'in the houses' (<u>ban</u> is the preposition 'in')
<u>hazakbol</u>	'from the houses' (<u>bol</u> is the preposition 'from'). ²⁹

Swahili

ni	-	ta	-	ku	-	penda
I		will		you		love

'I will love you'.

Turkish

ben	fare - yi	öl - dür - dü	- m
I(SUBJ)	mouse-the(OBJ)	die - CAUSE-PAST	- I

'I killed a mouse'.

(c) Synthetic or inflectional type of language where words inflect in order to fulfill certain functions. Latin is usually taken as an example of this type :

The nominative and the accusative forms of the noun 'girl'

puella	'the girl' (nominative)
puellum	'the girl' (accusative)

Latin inflectional affixes of the verb 'praise'

laudo	'I praise'
laudās	'you praise'
laudat	'he praises'
laudāmus	'we praise'
laudat	'they praise'
laudatis	'you (pl) praise'

28. Nancy Parrot Hickerson. 1980. *Linguistic Anthropology* p.41

29. Robert Lord. 1966. Op.cit p. 35

This kind of typological classification of languages provides a useful base for language analysis. But it must be kept in mind that not all languages will fall into any of these discrete types. Some of the world's languages may well fall in between the types. Perhaps it is more reasonable to think of the types as forming a cline whereby languages will typologically be discussed as being at a certain point of the cline.

Linguistics of the nineteenth century, like most other disciplines, felt the impact of Darwin's historic **The Origin of the Species** published in 1859. This impact is seen in the way certain linguistic scholars think of languages in terms of the evolutionary process. August Schleicher (1821-1908), a noted historical linguist, ranks as the foremost of these linguists who were of the opinion that languages as type grow and mature in a process of development. Their evolutionist approach make them choose morphological complexity as the sole criterion for determining the evolutionary advance in language. As Greenberg remarked : "an isolating language is one in which each word consists of a single morpheme. In the agglutinative stage words are multi-morphemic, but there are, ideally, no irregular alternations, such that, in principle, the assignment of certain phonemes to one or the other morphemes is arbitrary. This is sometimes called "fusion". The line of evolutionary advance then, is from isolating languages characterized by the simplest word structure, through the agglutinative stage, marked by the most complex types of formation. This was alternatively characterised as an advance from analytic to synthetic forms of thought or from formless to true form languages".³⁰ This evolutionist assumption of language advance has been mostly rejected by modern linguists on the ground that languages are different and are of different types. They do not necessarily represent stages of development and do not normally undergo a process indicated by the scholars mentioned above.

The Third Phase :

The third phase of the nineteenth century sees the emergence of the **Junggrammatiker** or the neo-

30. Joseph H. Greenberg, 1957. *Essays in Linguistics* p.60

grammarians' in Leipzig in the last quarter of the century. The most well-known figures of this group are Brugman, Osthoff, Laskien and Verner. These shared the view that languages change because of sound change and analogy. They were of the opinion that sounds change according to their phonetic environment and that there could be no exceptions to sound laws. Such laws operated regularly and were taken to be universal principles. Sound laws are generally of two types, unconditional or generic changes and conditioned changes.

Unconditioned changes are those that are not constrained by any condition, for example :

Old English /a:/ became Middle English /o:/
 1008)

ham	→	hoom	'home'
ban	→	boon	'bone'.

Conditioned changes, on the other hand, are those changes that are conditioned by their phonetic environment. This type of change is more common. Examples of this type of change are shown below :

Middle English /e/ became /a/ before /r/
 1008)

sterre	→	starre	'star'
derk	→	darke	'dark'

Analogy is also held responsible for some of the changes in a language as seen in the almost universal use of the plural suffix **-s** in English. For example, the form of the noun 'sorrow' is **sorg** in Old English :

Singular : Nominative **sorg**, genitive-dative-accusative **sorge**

Plural : Nominative-accusative-genitive **sorga**, dative **sorgum**.³¹

However, in Modern English the plural form of the noun 'sorrow' is 'sorrows' and declension of nouns has all but disappeared.

31. Theodora Bynon. 1977. Op. cit p.29

There have been problems in the neo-grammarians view of language analysis. The most obvious is the unfortunate use of the word 'law' which implies an operation by 'blind necessity', "a universal principle akin to natural laws such as the laws of gravity".³² Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the rigorous methodology of the neo-grammarians fulfills the scientific requirement of an objective analytic scholarly discipline and has left a lasting influence in the way rules are formulated particularly in the field of phonology.

32. Jean Aitchison. 1972. Op. cit p.29

CONCLUSION

This book is an attempt to present an insightful account into what linguistics is and how it has emerged and developed throughout the centuries. As has been stated time and again, linguistics is concerned with the study of language. The fact being so, linguists have always paid attention to discussion on what is language. This has led to many attempts to ascertain the characteristics of natural human language. Charles Hockett, in particular, lists thirteen design features of language, namely, vocal-auditory channel, broadcast transmission and directional reception, rapid fading, interchangeability, total feedback, specialization, semanticity, arbitrariness, discreteness, displacement, productivity, traditional or cultural transmission, duality of patterning. The last four design features are considered to be unique to human language.

In presenting the development of linguistics from the eighteenth century, one can see how the focus of the discipline has shifted from one period to another. Nonetheless, the fact remains that each movement, be it by an individual or by a group, has contributed enormously to the study of linguistics.

Chapter IV of this book deals with the development of linguistics both in Europe and in the USA during the first half of the twentieth century. Even though the sections show the names of the different school of linguistics, yet these have been dealt in a very condensed manner. In particular, the European schools, namely, the Prague School, the Copenhagen School, and the Firthian School have been focussed on the pioneers of the schools, namely Roman Jakobson-Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Hjelmslev and J.R. Firth respectively. No attempt is made to present a discussion on the followers of the schools. For example, Firth's concept of polysystems has given rise to many important linguistic theories. The most well-known among them is the Scale-and-Category Grammar developed by M.A.K. Halliday and his colleagues.

Finally, the second half of the twentieth century has been deliberately left untouched in this volume as this period unfolds a new era in linguistics. The discipline has developed so rapidly in all its branches of study with new theories and new frameworks emerging thick and fast. This has also led to the problem of methodology in relation to the study of language, be it in the area of pure linguistics such as syntax, phonology etc. or in sociolinguistics, language teaching etc. It is, therefore felt necessary that a new and separate volume should be prepared that will deal exclusively with the development of core areas of linguistics in the latter half of the twentieth century.

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