Meeting II
Introduction
(Historical and Comparative Linguistics)

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Introduction

• The nature of linguistic relationships
• Attitudes to language change
• Deliberately changing language
The Nature of Linguistic Relationships

• The history of modern linguistics → Course in General Linguistics

• Language is made up of a collection of units, all related to each other in very particular ways, on different levels. These different levels are themselves related in various ways to each other.

• The primary function of language is to express meanings, and to convey these to someone else.
The Nature of Linguistic Relationships

• To do this, the mental image in a speaker’s head has to be transferred into some psychical form so that it can be transferred to someone else who can then decode this psychical message and have the same mental image comes to his or her head.
Saussure’s important concepts

• Synchronic vs diacronic
• Arbitary vs iconic/natural
Synchronic and diachronic investigation

• Descriptive linguistics studies language in a given time, without reference to history. Thus it can be said to be synchronic.

• Opposed to this study is the study of a language at different points on the time dimension, called diachronic investigation.
Arbitrary

- The mental image in a speaker’s head and the physical form used to transfer this image are completely arbitrary.
- E.g. a certain kind of domestic animal is called a sisia in Motu (a language in Papua New Guinea), a huli in Paamese (language of Vanuatu), and a dog in English.
- If there were any kind of natural connection between a word and its meaning, we would all use the same word.
Some parts of a language are strongly iconic or natural.

All languages have onomatopoeic words like rokrof for “frog” and meme for “goat” in Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, or kokoroku for “chicken” in Motu.

However, such words are usually very small in number and not an important consideration in language as a whole.
Languages change in time

- Old English (10 century): Da astah on scyp, and oferseglode, and com on is ceastre. Da brohton hig hym anne laman, on bedde licgende.

- Early New English: And he entred into the shippe; and passed over and cam into his awne cite. And lo they brought unto him a man sicke off the palsey lyinge in his bed.

- New English: So he got into the boat and crossed over, and came to his own town. And now some men brought a paralysed man lying on a bed.
Languages change in time

- The changes that language undergo in the course of time are the data for historical linguistics.
- The historical linguist views human language as a dynamic, ever-changing phenomenon, stable insofar as it allows communication between speakers at given or nearby points of time, but it changing as it reflects changing speech habits, as it is subject to internal and external factors, and as it adapts to new situations of the speech community.
Languages change in time

• if we find two different words used by different people but they have similar meaning by using similar sounds. Then, there are possibilities:

  1. Some natural connection between the meaning and the form being used to express it.
  2. Some kind of historical connection
Languages change in time

- These connection could be of two kinds;
  - Three of these four languages simply borrowed these words from the fourth (or that all four borrowed from a fifth language elsewhere)
  - These forms all derive from a single set of original forms that has diverged differently in each case. This brings us to the important concepts of language relationship and Proto-language.

These terms were first recognized by Sir William Jones.
Languages change in time

- He was a British judge in colonial India.
- He had studied a wide variety of languages.
- 1786 he delivered a speech about Sankrit (one of the languages of ancient India).

1. He spoke of the idea of languages being related. The similarities were often explained by saying that Sankrit developed into Greek, and then Greek developed into Latin.

Sankrit $\leftrightarrow$ Greek $\leftrightarrow$ Latin (parallel development)
proto-language.

• Jones introduced the idea of “parallel” development in languages.
• It is the concept of language relationship.
• If two languages have a common origin, this means that they belong to a single family of languages.
2. He spoke the concept of the proto-language

Proto-language

Sanskrit    Greek    Latin

- The concepts of “proto-language” and “language relationship” both rest on the assumption that languages change.
- In fact, all languages change all the time.
Wala

walo  Peke  Puke
Proto Language

Bahasa Indonesia  Tolai  Paamese  Fijian  Maori

- Generally, when a proto-language evolves to produce a number of different daughter languages, we have no written records of the process.
- In the case of some of the languages of Europe, however, we have written records going back some thousands of years.
The concepts of proto-language and language relationship both rest on the assumption that languages change.

[Diagram: A tree structure with Latin at the root, branches leading to Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Rumanian.]
• But it is more often that we observe obviously related languages with no recorded ancestor (Germanic language). The linguist posits the existence of an unattested ancestor to explain the similarities (the group preceded by the word ‘common’
Proto-language

• Other languages die out, not because their speakers die out, but because for whatever reason, they abandon their own language.
  1. forced to do so (Australia)
  2. make the choice to switch to another language. (Papua New Guinea)
• Latin is not a dead language in the same sense that Tasmanian Aboriginal languages are dead.
• A proto-language can in some ways compared to a baby.
The process of discovering and describing the elements and rules of common language is known as reconstruction, and the method is called comparative method, since it involves comparing different language systems.
a. People everywhere tend to say that the older form of a language is in some sense ‘better’ than what is being used today. And the newer ways of speaking and writing are ‘incorrect’.

ex: Papua New Guinean older people say that their children do not speak the language ‘properly’ (their children cannot speak their own language ‘as well as’ their parents speak it) and check Crowley p 29 and p.30.
b. Check what Samuel Johnson said in his complete dictionary of the English languages. (or Crowley, 1992 on page 30)

c. It was a common belief among specialist scholars in 19th century that the languages of today were degenerating, and were not as ‘pure’ in structure as their ancestor languages.

d. Max Muller: the written history of all of the languages of Europe he could observe only a ‘gradual process of decay’. The proto-language from which Latin, Greek, and Sanksrit were derived was seen as being the most ‘pure” form of language that was possible.
The common fault in all of this thinking is that such people regard language change as unnatural, and wish it would never happen.

All human societies are always changing, and language is just another aspect of human society. Language change is natural and inevitable.
Deliberately changing languages

1. Samuel Johnson have tried to reverse changes that have already taken place.

2. However, there are situations in which the deliberate action of speakers can affect the future of a language.

3. In times of rapid social, cultural, and technological change, speakers of a language need to add new words to their vocabulary in order to talk about new things that come into their daily lives.
• Simply to copy from other language, at the same time adapting the sound of the word to the sound system of their own language.

• People tend to be linguistic purists and assume that words derived from another language as some kind of a threat to the integrity of their own language. (p.32)
• There were three basic choices in order to develop new terminology:

1. Simply indonesianize Dutch words (e.g. bioscoop-bioskop)

2. To take two words already found in the language and to join them together according to the pattern of the language to make up a new word. (p. 32).

3. To take an existing word and to extend its meaning to refer to a new thing. (surat originally referred to a new thing, the same word has now come to mean a certificate as well.)
• The council chose to resort to words of Dutch origin only as a last resort.
• The members of the council felt that it was important that the Indonesian republic should rely as far as possible on its own linguistic resources.
a. The linguist has four obvious sources of material: his own speech, the speech of others who speak his language, the speech of people who speak foreign languages, and written record.

b. Philology conjures up images of old, nearsighted (and probably German) professors leaning over ancient documents, consulting dusty reference works, and producing ten pages of commentary for each line of text in the manuscript.
c. Field work invokes the picture of a young linguist sprinting about the countryside, armed only with tape recorder and notebook, tracking down the last five speakers of some about-to-be-extinguished language, and eliciting from them series of paradigms and folktales.

d. The principle differences between these approaches lie in the nature and availability of the sources and in the methods of evaluating the data.
Philology and Field Work

e. Field worker pose direct questions to his informants about their language and culture, but he is handicapped because his data.

f. Philologist cannot ask native speakers of dead languages for information not found in his texts, he must often infer what is unseen from what is seen.
g. From the point of history, philologist has a definite advantage in that he may very well have texts from different time periods.

h. The method used by these two linguists may differ, but their goals are the same—good, reliable facts about specific languages, including word lists and glosses, original texts with their translations, and notes or comments about relevant cultural, historical, and geographical facts.
Philology and Field Work

i. To historical linguist, both philologist and field workers are indispensable for the same reason: they provide the data on which he bases his theories about the history of specific languages and the history of language in general.
Assignment 1

• Do the reading guide questions on p. 35.