

Course 1: Criticism of Transformationalism

The main criticism that Chomsky's theory was subject to is related to the way he described the sentence, particularly the syntactic and the semantic components of TGG and the relationship between them.

1. Generative Semantics

Generative semantics developed by Lakoff, McCawley in the late sixties started from the fact that the Standard Theory of Chomsky (1965), in which he stated that the sentence is organized on two levels; a deep structure and a surface structure where the syntactic component is believed to be the most important because it generates sentences, while the semantic component has only an interpretative role of what is generated by the base.

The proponents of Generative Semantics believe that that the roles of the syntactic and semantic components should be reversed. The generative process should start by producing sentences by specifying the semantic markers of individual words and the semantic relations between them. The syntactic component has an interpretative role because it operates on the output of the semantic component. The advantage of this reversal of roles is to account for similarities between sentences that are not reflected in the deep structure.

e.g. –I sold the car to John.

- John bought the car from me

TGG fails to show the similarity between the two sentences. We have to start first with the analysis of the semantic features of the verbs 'sell' and 'buy' as having a reciprocal relationship). For this theory, the speaker begins by generating the basic semantic content of 'what he wants to say', and after that he goes on to put it in an appropriate syntactic form.

2. Case Grammar

Case Grammar was introduced as an influential grammatical analysis emerging out of TGG. It was devised in the late 1960s by the American linguist Charles Fillmore. Like generative

semantics, case grammar considers semantic information prior to syntactic information: Meanings are generated first, and then, they are correlated with sentence structure via syntactic and other rules.

Eg:

1. John (agent) opened the door with the key
2. The key (instrument) opened the door.
3. John used the key to open the door.
4. It was the key that opened the door.
5. It was John who opened the door with the key.

In all these sentences, the noun phrase 'the key' has the same underlying function (instrument) despite the various surface structures (subject in (2), object in (3), complement in (4), and an adverbial phrase in (1)). In (1) and (5), John is always the doer of the action (agent) despite the different surface structures (subject, complement).

It appears from these sentences that the functional relationships between NPs and verbs are far more complex than what was suggested by Chomsky. Function is independent of the syntactic information. In case grammar the verb is regarded as the most important part of the sentence, and has a number of semantic relationships with various noun phrases. These relationships are called cases. The underlying structure of the sentence contains a verb and one or more noun phrases, each noun phrase being associated to the verb in a particular case relationship. For Fillmore, the cases of NPs form the deep structure (the base): they turn around the VP, and their order is not important in their description. By applying transformations to them they are shifted to get their surface places.

With this analysis, we have moved from the view that the base of a grammar is purely syntactic to the view that the base of grammar is mainly semantic, and it takes the form of cases.

Course 2: Sociolinguistics

Introduction

By the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, an increasing attention was paid to the tight interconnection between language and society which led to the expansion of an innovative sub-discipline within macro-linguistics; Sociolinguistics.

Language is a social phenomenon. It is not isolated from the social context and consequently, any attempt to study language without reference to its social dimension can result in the omission of some interesting aspects of language.

Sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary subject which deals with both linguistics and sociology. It studies the way language interacts with society. Sociolinguistic research is intended to achieve a better understanding of human language by studying it in its social context. Society is used in its wide sense to cover many aspects such as: race, nationality, ethnic group, social class, educational level, age, and sex.

1. Branches of Sociolinguistics

Linguists diverge as to what they incorporate under sociolinguistics. Many linguists limit its scope to the detailed study of the micro-processes of interpersonal communication. This view takes the individual in small intra-group interactions as its centre of attention (speech acts, conversation analysis, speech events, sequencing of utterances). This view shares areas of common interest with psychology. This is often referred to as micro-sociolinguistics. It includes face-to-face interaction and conversation analysis. The linguist takes into account the extra-linguistic factors, which were previously excluded from linguistic investigation (gestures, spacial proximity, and eye contact).

Others extend sociolinguistics to interaction at the large inter-group level within one society or between two societies. It relates variation in the language used by a group of people to social factors (such as the study of language choice in bilingual or multilingual communities,

language planning, and language attitudes). These are referred to as macro-sociolinguistics, or the sociology of language. This view is more sociological in perspective and has clear ties with sociology itself, economics, anthropology and political science, depending on the nature, composition and size of the group.

2. Aspects of the Relationship between Language and Society

The effect of society on language has three dimensions: the effect of the physical environment, the effect of the social environment and the effect of social values.

2.1. The Physical Environment

The physical environment (geographical environment) in which a society lives is reflected in language in the structure of its lexicon, the way in which distinctions are made by means of single words. Lexical gaps are filled up by paraphrasing when translating from one language into another. (e.g. red dates, fine snow, etc)

Examples:

- Bedouin Arabs have a large camel vocabulary.
- Some dialects of Arabic in the south of Algeria have a large vocabulary associated with dates and sand.

2.2. The Social Environment

The social organization or the way society is structured can also be reflected in language and can have an effect on the structure of vocabulary. What is vital in the social structure has a specific lexicon. If the structure of society changes, this will be reflected in the words (some words may disappear). A good example is the kinship system. Family relationships are reflected in kinship vocabulary. Kinship relations are shown in language depending on many factors: respect, generation distance, social function, etc.

Eg.

-English speaking societies use terms like: father, mother, son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, brother, sister, husband, wife, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, cousin...

-Arabic-speaking societies: there are two distinct words for 'paternal uncle' and 'maternal uncle'. This distinction is important in these societies.

Social environment is reflected in some languages in the use of sexist language, that is to say, language that is patronising or contemptuous towards one sex, usually women. Sexist language has been under attack by feminist movements for several decades. There are attempts to eliminate it, for example, the use of words like 'chairperson', 'firefighter', 'human being', the use of pronouns like 'they', 'their', or even using 'she' or 'her', to refer to both sexes. Some even tried to invent neutral pronouns in English.

Examples

- In English, pronominalisation of some nouns like 'person' is by the pronoun 'he' not 'she', even when addressing a mixed group.

- The following words are male-oriented: postman, chairman, fireman, mankind (referring to human beings)

2.3. Social Values

The values of society can have an effect on its language. You can learn a lot about a society's values from the way language is used. There are two phenomena in which social values can be seen in language: Taboo and religious expressions.

Taboo is the behaviour that is believed to be forbidden, or immoral. It is strongly prohibited for irrational reasons. This is reflected in language, in words or expressions which are not said. There are inhibitions in their use. Taboo words have rules of use that everybody within the speech community has to adhere to. Taboo words are offensive (insulting). They are a good reflection of the system of moral or religious values and beliefs of the society in

question. They differ from society to another. Taboo words are usually replaced by words and expressions which are less shocking. These are called euphemisms: they are more polite than some other words.

Some expressions in language show the importance of religion in society. Some ways of addressing people also reflect the influence of religion. These words are not used in other languages and cannot be translated.