

PG SEM III  
UNIT II  
Historical Linguistics  
Lecture-I

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*Difference between Linguistics and Language.*

*We speak many languages. There could be people around who speak three languages. Being an Indian, it is such a common thing. There are people who may know four, five or six languages at one go, and the first thing that you need to remember is that just by speaking many languages you cannot be a linguist. You would be called a polyglot. But then that does not really give you the authority to call yourself a linguist. Speaking a language and studying a language are two different issues altogether.*

*There is also a lot of confusion between writing aspect of language and spoken aspect of language, for that matter, language and script and a lot of people think that correct and incorrect speech is a big thing to discuss because there is a set pattern and you have to use the language in that way but that is not something linguists do, rather they always advocate for a non-puritan view of language. So, do not be a language purist and try to understand what is the difference between language with the big L and languages with a small l.*

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A linguist studies various levels and the analysis goes on many different levels like phonological level where they study sounds, morphological levels where they study morphemes and words, syntactic level deals with the sentence construction or the sentence structure. In the area of semantics linguists try to understand how meaning plays a vital role in the whole discipline called linguistics and finally, pragmatics that is studied at a pragmatic level; that means, how language is being used in the discourse as a system, the real use of language in society. The largest community would be English because there are several hundred millions of speakers across the globe. This is the lingua franca. It's the linking language. So, English is a language which has a varied, huge and a good numbered speech community. Then we also have very small speech communities. Let's take an example from India as a linguistic area, then there are the tribal languages or the indigenous languages which have very few numbers of speakers. The biggest speech communities belong to the Indo-European language family. We generally appreciate

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languages and varieties. Why do we call something as a language and something as a dialect, is a different thing altogether? But then let's remember if you are a linguist, you kind of get excited when you see some variation or some difference. Even within a major language like English when you encounter, a country like US speaks it in a different way than a country like India. All these countries they have their typical ways of speaking English. So, these variations then are considered to be very interesting when you try to appreciate this as a language. Even the languages which have tiny speech communities, let us say the tribal languages in India, when you work on such languages, it also gives you an idea how beautifully the systematic study of language can be. So this is only done by a linguist. It is very unlikely any other academic discipline is going to approach it from this much of appreciation. So, that is why we must know how to appreciate this discipline which is called linguistics. Linguists also study this tool as a systematic phenomenon and obviously we are trying to understand the comprehensive and the scientific

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*explanations behind almost all kinds of linguistic units that we see or that we use. That is the scope of linguistics that we have to understand; the relation between human mind/ brain and language. A linguist appreciates it in the best possible ways. That is why this discipline is truly interdisciplinary. All of us speak some language or the other, and since we speak languages and some of us are multilingual, we speak many languages at a time. And that sort of undermines the potential that language as a tool has. Studying it carefully can actually open up many doors to understand the human behaviour and human cognition. It can also give you an idea how to trace the human movements. So, language can actually do multiple things. And since it comes to us naturally and we tend to take it in a very casual manner, and something like that we breathe and we talk. So, that is the reason why language remains an area which needs to be probed further in different ways. There are very few philosophers who actually talk about language or they try to study language from a philosophical perspective. Otherwise if you look at it from the*

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*day-to-day discourse, our educational discourse, you see that hardly has there been any effort paid to put language in our educational programmes. So, in the last century, language has been studied in a scientific way, by careful and comprehensive observation. So, linguists are making a sincere effort to understand how it can be studied in a careful manner. So, we must know what is the potential that this discipline has and what kind of possibilities we as linguists and language enthusiasts for that matter, can bring into this discipline.*