

APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE STUDY ACROSS THE AGES: A SURVEY

Ebi Yeibo, Ph.D
Niger Delta University
Faculty of Arts
Department of English and Literary Studies
Wilberforce Island
Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Abstract

Language is the supreme tool of communication among human beings and encompasses diverse media i.e. verbal, written, gesturing, facial expression or sign language. It is exclusively a human attribute and is the most important endowment that distinguishes humans from other animals. Generally, languages manifest features of productivity, recursivity and displacement. They depend on social convention, acquisition and learning for their sustenance. It is logical to state that human existence and societal cohesion and development revolve around the concept of language. Hence scholars/linguists of different persuasions have been attracted to the concept over the years, propounding various approaches/theories, methods and techniques to objectively, systematically and efficiently describe its nature and explain its workings. The present study explores such approaches/theories that were propounded in the different periods of human history, highlighting the drawbacks of each approach/theory which precipitated a successive one. The aim, essentially, is not only to document a significant part of linguistic history and taxonomy, but also to place them (i.e. the approaches/theories) in their proper perspectives.

Keywords: Communication, Human attribute, Linguistic history, Language study, Linguistic approaches, a survey.

The study covers early attempts at language study and the various structural and functional approaches adopted by grammarians or language scholars for the study of

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language over the years, highlighting the drawbacks of each approach which led to the evolution of new approaches. Specifically, it highlights traditional approaches such as Panini's Sanskrit Grammar and the grammarians and philosophers of ancient Greece, Rome and India (see Crystal (1997:408) i.e from Plato, Socrates to Hermogenes and Cratylus who developed the first ideas of language; to European and American Structuralism in the 20th century, with particular focus on the works of Ferdinand De Saussure, Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield; to the rise of many new fields in linguistics in the twentieth century such as Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar, Labov's sociolinguistics, Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and modern psycholinguistics. Other highlights of the study include a review of functional approaches to language study such as discourse analysis, conversation analysis, semiotics, pragmatics, speech acts and stylistics.

Language is the supreme tool or means of communication among humans (Osundare, 2003:36). According to Bloch and Trager (1942), it is system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. Alo (1995:7) defines the concept as "a universal means of human communication". In the words of Ndimele (2001:1),

Language is essentially a communication system.... Linguistic units of expression (e.g. sounds, words, sentences, etc) are the signs of objects, entities or states of affairs that they represent. The relationship between a sign and the entity it stands for is known as signification.

According to Hill (1977:9), it is

...the primary and most highly elaborated form of human symbolic activity. It is made up of symbols made by sounds produced by the vocal apparatus which are arranged in classes, and patterns which make up a complex and symmetrical structure...

From the foregoing definitions, it is clear that the concept of language encompasses communication of whatever medium - verbal, written, gesturing, facial expression or sign language. Etymologically, language is got from the Latin word "Lingua" through French "Langua" –meaning "tongue". It is synonymous with tongue because the tongue is the main organ for speech production and language is primarily spoken and heard, that is, oral and auditory (Quirk and Greenbaun 1990:21). In Syal and Jindal's (2010:5/6) view,

In the scheme of things, all humans are blessed with language and it is the specific property of humans only - language is thus species-specific and species-uniform. It is because of the use of language that humans are called "talking animals" (Homo Loquens)"

It is, therefore, the highpoint of human existence, making us unique and distinguished from other animals. Ejele (1996:4) posits that "the possession of language is the important attribute that distinguishes humans from other animals. Language is the source of human life and power. Thus as human beings, we know at least one language". In Thomas's (2009:1) view "the gift of language is the human trait that marks us out genetically, setting us apart from the rest of life". Human language has the properties of productivity, recursivity, and displacement, and relies entirely on social convention and learning, its complex structure affords a much wider range of expressions than any known system of animal communication.

The major focus of linguistics, which is a big strand of the present study, is the description and explanation of the human faculty of language. Hence it is basically defined as a science of language. It describes and studies human language scientifically in the sense that its methods and techniques are explicit, objective and systematic, like other science-based disciplines. It also follows the scientific process of observation, formulation of hypothesis, experimentation and the propounding of theories which guide its study. According to Alo (1995:7),

The study of language has been of interest to scholars in different fields, in philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology and in science. Several of these disciplines have examined language in relation to specific concerns and interests, but to the language scholar or linguist, language is an independent entity with a system of its own being discoverable through scientific observation and study.

Essentially, general linguistics is a theory about how human languages work. It provides categories, derived from generalizations based on observation of human languages. These categories may be applied to the description of any particular language. Other branches of linguistics include sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, descriptive linguistics and applied linguistics. In ancient civilization, linguistic study was originally motivated by the correct description of classical liturgical language, notably that of Sanskrit grammar by Panini Tolkppiyam in Tamil, or by the development of logic and rhetoric among the Greeks. Beginning around the 4th century BCE, China also developed its own grammatical traditions and Arabic grammar and Hebrew grammar developed during the middle ages.

Modern linguistics began to develop in the 18th century, reaching the Golden age of Philology in the century. The first half of the 20th century was marked by the structuralist school, based on the work of Ferdinand De Saussure in Europe and Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield in the United States. The 1960s saw the rise of many new fields in linguistics, such as Noam Chomsky's generative grammar, William Labov's sociolinguistics, Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and also modern psycholinguistics.

Early Approaches

Linguists of different persuasions have interested themselves in the study of language and in defining it through efficient analytical methods. In other words, they have shown deep interest in the development of systematic ways of talking about its nature, aspects of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and its meaning. This interest, according to Carcia (1977:129),

...stems from the expectation that general principles underlying a certain approach will determine for any specific problem, a particular analysis congruent with those principles.

According to Syal and Jindal (2010:39),

The study of language is almost as old as language and civilization, though the growth of the modern science of linguistics as we know it now is fairly recent. There is discussion on the importance and origin of language in many ancient religious texts including the Bible and the Vedas. Language was studied on a systematic basis in ancient India and in ancient Greece and Rome. These studies established the foundation for subsequent developments.

A historical account of the study of linguistics would not be complete without highlighting the place of Sanskrit grammar and its foremost scholar, Panini. Syal and Jindal (2010:39) also observe that,

The religious hymns of the Hindus were composed in Sanskrit in around 1800-1200 BC. Sanskrit became the language of religion, of 'mantra' and of ritual. There was a belief that this language should be preserved in its original grammar and pronunciation for the effective practice of religious rituals. Sanskrit grammar originated as an attempt to preserve the classical language of the scriptures. This led to a comprehensive description of Sanskrit at the levels of phonetics, grammar and semantics. Thus a tradition of scholarship in linguistics developed which spanned several centuries.

The scholars (ibid) add that,

The most important name in Sanskrit linguistics is that of the grammarian Panini (around 400 BC), who gave a detailed description of Sanskrit grammar. Bloomfield (1933, P.11) wrote about Panini's grammar that it is "one of the greatest monuments of human intelligence. It describes, in minute detail, every inflection, derivation and composition, and every syntactic usage of its author's speech. No other language to this day has been so perfectly described.

As we have earlier mentioned, several of the important issues of language analysis were addressed by the grammarians and philosophers of ancient Greece, Rome and India (see Crystal (1997:408) i.e. from Plato, Socrates to Hermogenes and Cratylus who developed the first ideas of language viz: the Conventionalist and the Naturalist Schools. The naturalist school sees language as a natural phenomenon and conceives of the relationship between words and things or objects as intrinsic. The Conventionalist school, on the other hand, conceives of language as a product of convention and that the relationship between words and things or objects they refer to is arbitrary. According to Syal and Jindal (2010:14),

The Greeks studied language systematically, as they did other areas of human knowledge, and attempted to give philosophical and logical explanations of language. From the very beginning of Greek scholarship, there was a debate on language. Plato's *Cratylus* (427-347 BC) was concerned with the origins of words (etymology) and gave rise to a controversy between Analogists, who believed that language was regular and based on logic (Plato was an analogist) and the Anomalists, who believed that properties of things were not related to the words used to name them, and that there was a great deal of irregular change taking place in words (this viewpoint was held by the Stoics, a school of philosophers in Greece).

Syal and Jindal (ibid) further explain that,

Apart from this philosophical debate, the Greeks gave attention to the areas of etymology, phonetics and grammar. The most well known Greek grammarians were Dionysius Thrax (100 BC), the author of *Techne*, and Apollonius (200 AD), besides others. Their studies were based on the written language (Greek); on this basis, they classified elements of grammar and gave explanatory rules and definitions which are still regarded as standard.

A significant development in linguistics was witnessed in the third century B.C when the Stoics established, more formally, the basic grammatical notions that have since, via Latin, become traditional in western thought. The linguists of this period classified words into eight natural classes (i.e. parts of speech). Also during this period,

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emphasis in language study shifted from spoken to written language; attention was paid to speech articulation, accent marks were added to writing as a guide to pronunciation, and the main interests were in the field of grammar and etymology, rather than phonetics. The period also marked the emergence of a doctrine of correctness and stylistic excellence.

The next significant phase was the Roman period whose writers introduced a speculative approach to language study (see Lamidi, 2000:5). The linguists of this period developed on the Greek precedent discussed above, retaining Greek categories and terminology. A salient work of this period is that of Varro. The work takes into account several differences between Latin and Greek. It also holds the view that language is first and foremost, a social phenomenon with a communicative purpose. This means that its role as a tool for logical and philosophical enquiry is secondary. Several other works which centered on the field of grammar and rhetoric include that of Cicero (106- 43BC), which is on style; Quintilian (1st century AD), which is on usage and public speaking ; Julius Caesar, on grammatical regularity; Aelius Donatus (4th century AD), on grammar of Latin; and Priscian (6th century AD), on grammatical categories. Crystal (1994:49) points out that the main contribution of the Roman period was a model of grammatical description that was handed down through many writers in Europe. This ultimately became the basis of language teaching in the middle ages and the renaissance period. It was this grammatical model that became the “traditional” approach to grammar, which continues to exercise its influences in modern linguistic analysis. Several concepts of modern linguistics derive from this tradition. The major criticism of this approach to language is its prescriptive nature.

Formalist Approaches

It must be emphasized that the middle ages and renaissance witnessed a more systematic study of European languages. There was rapid dissemination of ideas due to the availability of printing. Syal and Jindal (2010:43) observe that,

During the seventeenth century, interest arose in modern European languages with an emphasis on French as a language of elegance and beauty, leading to the establishment of the Port Royal School of Grammar. This school expounded a general theory of grammar based on logic through the medium of languages such as Latin and French. During this time too, English grammars were written. They were preceded by the work of Holder whose *Elements of Speech* was published in 1669 by the Royal Society. Holder was influenced by the English empiricist tradition and made observations on phonetics and pronunciation, identifying consonant differences and vocalic differences. English grammar took the Latin grammar as its basis, but the

empiricist tradition of observation helped them to test and modify this grammar according to the actual patterns and structures of English.

The periods also saw the development of western lexicography. According to Crystal (1987: 98), the first shift from the traditional literary way of looking at literature occurred in France and was known as “Explication de texts”. This scholar explained that the major focus of the approach was on treating texts as unique and autonomous units of meaning, with a complex internal structure that could be discovered through a meticulous language analysis. This method also involved relating the linguistic features (i.e. figurative language or metrical structure) to the historical background of the text and the reader’s response. On the contrary, critics of the formalist school of Russia (later Czech) saw the literary text as an end in itself, without considering the writer’s intention, the reader’s reaction and social history, in the early 20th century. The critics of this period saw the literary text as a special variety of language use that could be explained or interpreted through a systematic and technical analysis. Scholars such as I. A. Richards, William Empson and Cleanth Brooks introduced these principles into modern English criticism. Roman Jakobson, the Russian linguist, greatly influenced the development of an entirely linguistic approach to the study of style, which was later referred to as “linguistic stylistics” (or stylolinguistics). The limitations of formalism included the fact that,

- i. Their techniques couldn’t cope with larger texts such as the novel.
- ii. It was unable to handle literatures that did not use “literary language”.

Syal and Jindal (2010:43) observe that,

There were many significant developments in the nineteenth century which prepared the way for the growth of modern linguistics in the twentieth century. As a result of exposure to other linguistic traditions during the age of colonial expansion, there was a great deal of interest in historical and comparative study of languages. Scholars were keen to explore how languages were related to one another and formed distinct language groups or ‘families’, e.g. the Indo-European. The discovery of the relationship between Sanskrit and the major languages of Europe (through the work of Sir William Jones) was the greatest impetus to historical studies of the European languages, as western scholars benefited from the techniques of analysis adopted by the ancient Sanskrit grammarians and used them to describe European languages in a similar way, e.g. Schlegel’s essay ‘On the Language and the Learning of the Indians’ (1808)

Structuralist Approaches

The Twentieth also witnessed significant developments in language and linguistics. According to Syal and Jindal (2010:44),

The study of the sound systems of languages by phoneticians and comparative linguists in the nineteenth century prepared the way for a descriptive approach to language, that is, for the description of the structure of language. Many languages that had been hitherto under described were now being described at the level of their sound systems, and, taking a cue from the methods of Sanskrit phoneticians, attempts were made to distinguish the sound system from the alphabet system (as, for example, in the case of English). It was felt that the sound system of any language could be described if linguists had a standard notation for the transcription of speech sounds based on a classification of sounds into vowel and consonant types, each sound being characterized by its place and manner of articulation and given a particular symbol. This set of symbols could then be used to describe the speech sounds of any language. The need for such a notation as a means of transcription of speech sounds led to the devising of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Later in the twentieth century, there was the development of structuralism informed by the need to provide an alternative to formalism and correct the weaknesses of traditional grammar. The major focus of structuralism was to,

...define universal principles of literary structure using linguistic techniques... (It) focused on finding a common structure underlying the many kinds of narrative text (i.e. folktales, myths, detective stories (See Crystal, 1987:108).

Crystal (1987: 109) adds that:

It paid little attention in its analysis to the role of the human mind or social reality. A poem, for example, was to be understood not by studying the experience of the poet, the reader, or the world, but by the text.

Structuralism, in a European sense, refers to the view that there is an abstract relational structure that underlines language and is to be distinguished from actual utterances, a system underlying actual behaviour and this is the primary object of study for linguists (see Lyons 1981:1994). Structuralism emphasizes the necessity of treating language as a more or less coherent and integrated system (Lamidi 2000:18). Two schools of structuralism are particularly prominent. These are European structuralism and American structuralism. Other schools include Prague school, represented by Nnikolary, Serge Yevich, Trubestkoy, Roman Jakobson; and the Copenhagen or Glossematic school which centred around Louis Hjelmslev, John Rupert Firth and his London school followers. According to Lamidi (2000:8), structuralism began in Europe

with the posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course de Linguistique General* whose major thrusts are the interrelationship of langue and paroles as well as form and substance on the one hand, and synchronic and diachronic linguistics on the other. "Langue" is conceived as the totality of regularities and pattern of formation that underlie the utterances of language, while "Parole" refers to the actual utterances themselves. Saussure also draws distinction between synchronic linguistics and diachronic linguistics. The latter deals with the historical development of isolated elements, while the former deals with the structure of a language at a particular point in time. Syal and Jindal (2010:47) state that,

Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) ushered in a revolution in linguistics and in the understanding of the structure of language. He made several important distinctions in the area of language study that set the foundation for the modern structural approach to language - the distinctions between langue and parole, synchronic and diachronic, form and substance.... Saussure also introduced the concept of language as a system of signs. This concept became important not only for the understanding of language but also for the understanding of all human and social structures as sign systems.

According to these scholars (ibid), Saussure's 'Sign'

...consists of two elements: the signifier (e.g a word) and the signified (the concept or meaning). The sign is a composite of both elements in relationship with each other, and is the central fact of language. The relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, which means that there is no essential or logical connection between the two. As each language has a different and arbitrary ways of organizing the world into concepts, each language produces a different set of signifieds. The signifier-signified relationship is established by social agreement, therefore, language is essentially social and has the authority of social convention.

The second major group of structuralism is the American tradition spearheaded by such linguists as Franz Boas, Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield. They advocated for the analysis of linguistic data, using a scientific approach i.e. the use of the objective and empirical methods to support abstract linguistic claims. The group also treats language as a unique, coherent and integrated system. Lyons (1994: 1998) observes that Leonard Bloomfield made the most remarkable contribution to American structuralism. His preoccupation was the development of language as human behaviour. Bloomfield considered meaning to be a relationship between a stimulus and a verbal response. This

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view of Bloomfield was criticized by his followers, on the ground that science could not pin down meaning to specific stimuli. In the view of Syal and Jindal (2010:46),

Some limitations of Bloomfield's approach are obvious. It is a purely mechanistic explanation and does not take into account the creativity and variability of language. The descriptive approach of Bloomfield, Hockett and others represents the thinking of the American structuralists in the first half of the twentieth century which was influential till another phase of linguistic studies was initiated by Chomsky in 1957, after which the behaviourist school ceased to be popular and emphasis shifted to devising a theory of language. However, the methods of description and analysis, developed by these structuralists continued to be adopted by linguists to provide systematic and precise accounts of phonology and syntax in various languages.

According to Crystal (1987), the limitations of structuralism include:

- i. That it did not reflect reality (i.e. the multiple meaning of words and the role historical factors play in textual interpretation).
- ii. That it was so scientific and objective that an author's individuality and the social context are sacrificed.
- iii. That it did not involve the study of meaning.

In spite of these limitations, however, it must be noted that the first attempt in linguistics at discovering and describing the structure of any language, is traceable to the age of structuralism. The structuralists designed for each language, structured forms for identifying words and their classes. Syal and Jindal (2010:47) observe that,

Of the later American structuralists, Z. Harris attempted to find discovery procedures for a theory of grammar through the process of analyzing data, and Pike developed the notion of immediate constituents in a method of grammatical analysis called tagmemics, which is the analysis of grammatical units according to the functions they perform, and brings in the aspect of meaning into syntactic functioning.

Another important development in linguistic study was the contributions of the Prague School. According to Syal and Vindal (2010:48), the school "...consisted of a group of linguists who met regularly in the Czech capital, Prague, in the twenties and thirties, under the leadership of Count Trubetskoy, a Professor from Vienna, and the author of *Principles of Phonology* (1939). These scholars (ibid) state that major theorists of this school include Jakobson who studied Russian phonology and discovered that there are a limited number of phonological features selected by a language. According to these scholars (ibid),

Along with the structural, the Prague school linguists also emphasized the functional aspects of grammar, e.g. Mathesius made statements of all relationship

between the grammatical and informational part of the sentence which was characterized as 'theme' and 'rheme' respectively as the 'given' and 'new' information. A combination of the structural and functional approaches also led the Prague linguists to consider the functions of language in literary texts, and they initiated studies in stylistics.

Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar

In the 1950's, Transformational grammar emerged. This approach to language study is essentially a reaction against the continuation of post Bloomfieldian structuralism. The grammar focused on syntax and draws some distinctions between deep and surface structures. There are two main traditions of transformational Grammar viz: Zellig S. Harris and Chomsky. Some of the features of this grammar were first proposed in Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957). According to Widdowson (1975), the assumptions of Transformational Grammar include the fact that a native speaker of a language has the ability to produce and understand not only those sentences he has actually heard before, but also an unlimited number of possible sentences, which he has never heard before. It is the function of grammar to account for all the possible or potential sentences in language. But it cannot do so by describing all the potential sentences since these are unlimited, or indefinite, in number. A grammar, therefore, states a limited or definite number of rules which represent the underlying system of the language and which can be applied to produce an infinite number of sentences in the language. A generative grammar consists of a set of generative rules. A transformational Generative Grammar further distinguishes between two types of rules i.e. one which generates the sentences that make up the central "core" of a language and the other which derives all other sentences from those of the core. According to Groden and Kresworth (1997:3), it was Noam Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar that signaled the arrival of stylistics as a discipline with independent self-defined goals, if not a real, autonomous discipline from either linguistic or literary critical approaches to language analysis. According to Syal and Vindal (2010:48/49), Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*

...overcomes the limitations of Bloomfield's immediate constituent approach which did not explain discontinuity, ambiguity transformation in sentence structure. Chomsky does this by focusing on a native speaker's knowledge of his own language, which he calls 'competence'. It contains the knowledge of basic structures together with the rules for transforming these structures into a number of transformations. This explains the native speaker's ability to generate an infinite number of actual sentences. The characteristic of this approach is that it integrates semantic, syntactic and phonological

levels. Though it incorporates detailed rules for the basic structures and transformations of sentences (known as the phrase structure rules), it is not merely analytic or descriptive, it provides a powerful theory explaining language creativity and transformation.

Functional Approaches

However, transformational grammar was heavily criticized for its faulty indifference to context of situation, meaning and style (see Oha, 1994). This provided a fertile ground for the growth in England of yet another model of language known as functional linguistics. The interest of this grammar is not only in describing the structure of language but also in explaining the properties of discourse and its functions. Syal and Jindal (2010:49) observe that,

In recent years there has also been a tremendous development in the areas of semantics, sociolinguistics and the analysis of discourse.... Linguists have been analysing the social and conventional rules underlying conversation and discourse-both spoken and written-to achieve a better understanding of language use in communication.

These efforts revolved around the work of J.R. Firth in general and M.A.K. Halliday in particular. According to Syal and Jindal (2010:49),

While in USA Chomsky led this revolution in grammar, in UK, linguists like J.R. Firth, a Professor of Linguistics in London, also addressed language description in relation to meaning and context. He gave the idea of 'context of situation' which is that utterances (composed of words and phrases) are functional in particular situational contexts. Firth also contributed to phonology in giving an account of prosodic phonology, i.e. connected speech in which the articulation of syllables and words is affected by factors such as stress, juncture and intonation (also known as supra segmental features). Firth's ideas were developed by the neo-Firthian school led by Halliday and others who worked out the details of the functional grammar suggested by Firth into an elaborate account of syntax known as scale and category grammar. This grammar links grammatical (formal) features to function in context.

In Hallidayan (1971) perception, a formal feature is stylistic if it has a particular meaning, effect or value. This notion emphasizes how language functions in texts and the nexus between language and what it is used for, or to achieve. The critical point here is that, whatever linguistic resource that is worth describing must be put to use, in the sense that the description and interpretation are necessarily based on the situational variables that prompted its use. Hence Oha (1994:730) posits that the approach recognizes the interdependency of style, meaning and context of situation and that the

latter should not be subjected to second fiddle position, or ignored, in the analysis of style.

According to Crystal (1987), the systemic functional approach sees grammar as a network of systems of interrelated contrasts and pays particular attention to the semantic and pragmatic aspects of analysis. Spencer and Gregory (1964:02) also affirm that,

When examining style, and using linguistics in so doing, the analyst should, we believe, not only take into account linguistic features in isolation, but also consider their relation to other aspects of the text and its contextual setting. Otherwise, his final statements will be merely linguistic.

It is thus the insistence on contextual interrelations of texts by the systemic- functional approach that makes it most suitable for the analysis of literary texts. No doubt, texts are products of societies and times. The spatio-temporal dimension of literary texts implies that we need to be thoroughly informed about the contextual circumstances of such texts for accurate linguistic explication.

Another critical functional approach to language study is what is referred to as Conversation Analysis. According to Hutchby and Woofit (1998:14), conversation Analysis (CA) is the study of “recorded naturally occurring talk in interaction”. Olateju (2004:23) observed that it is “concerned mainly with structure of talk, which produces patterns of social interaction”. This scholar (Ibid) further observed that Conversation Analysis also deals with preference. The scholar hinges this viewpoint on the fact that at any point in time, some types of utterances are preferred and are more favoured than others. For example, the socially preferred response to a greeting is a greeting.

Basically, the conversation analyst is interested in turn-taking, opening and closing of conversations, adjacency pairs, topic management and topic shift, conversational repairs, showing agreement and disagreement, introducing bad news and processes of trouble telling (see Olateju, 2004). While some scholars see no tangible differences between Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis, others see the latter as an aspect of the former. A critical point is that, like Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis focuses on the structure and organization of conversations and dialogues. In the study of Conversation Analysis, however, the sociological and communicative approach to language study referred to as ethno-methodology is very critical (see Olateju, 2004). Ethno -methodology focuses on the relation between what interlocutors ‘do’ in conversations or dialogues and what they know about the conversation or dialogue. This link is imperative for achieving coherence in conversations. Ethnomethodology is also concerned with how society is organized and how it functions.

The term “pragmatics” originated from the philosopher, Charles Morris (1938) (see Levinson, 1983; Encyclopedia Americana, 1994; Osisaanwo, 2003). According to Slembrouck (2004), it focuses on sociological aspects of language use, such as presuppositions (i.e. implicit meaning, meaning that is logically entailed by using a given linguistic structure), face and politeness phenomena (i.e. socio-relational aspects of and situational constraints on information exchange), and reference (i.e. how speakers establish various types of linkage between utterances and elements in a situational context). A critical point in pragmatics is that it emphasizes context of situation in its study of language use. The adjective ‘pragmatic’ itself means the capacity of a social actor to adjust to situational circumstances. Hence Opara (2005) defined the concept as generally the way context influences the way we interpret sentences. According to this scholar (ibid), pragmatics thematizes meaning, context, communication, presupposition, face and politeness phenomena, reference, implicature, inference and the relationship between language use and the language user in a situational context. Opara (2005) further explains that two of Halliday’s metafunctions of language (i.e. interpersonal and textual), emphasize the importance of pragmatic and rhetorical considerations in linguistic study as ways in which users implement cognitive or ideational code of language for communicative ends.

The speech Act theory is associated with John Austin (1962) and Searle (1965, 1969). It focuses on the fact that to speak is to do something (Opara, 2005). Important terms in the theory include constatives (i.e. statements which describe something outside the text and can be judged true or false) and performatives (i.e. utterances which are not true or false but which bring about a particular social effect, that is perform action or do things). The main issue in Speech Act Theory is its view of or approach to language use as an act or performative (i.e. Utterances that do something). Basically, there are three main speech acts viz: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary act. A locution is an utterance. According to Osisanwo (2003) a locutionary act refers to the formal and literal meaning of an utterance. Austin (1975:92) explains that it has three components viz: phonetic component (i.e. phonological), phatic component (i.e. syntactic) and rhetic component (i.e. meaningful, both in sense and denotation) (See Osisanwo, 2003). This implies that a locutioary act is linguistic. Illocutionary, on the other hand, is a non-linguistic act which ensues from locution. It refers to what the speaker does by using the utterances i.e. denying, asserting, congratulating, greeting, apologizing, promising or advising etc. According to Osisanwo (2003), a force normally accompanies the illocutionary act, and is referred to as illocutionary force. Perlocutionary act, at another level, refers to the effect of an utterance i.e. what the speaker has done or achieved with the utterance. Another critical aspect of the speech act theory is that for a performative

to be effective or have illocutionary force, it should meet certain social and cultural conditions, known as felicity conditions viz:

- i. Sincerity condition i.e. how sincere is the speaker with the particular illocutionary act? If a speaker meets the content of utterance, the illocutionary act is felicitous. If it is a deceit, it is infelicitous.
- ii. Preparatory condition i.e. How appropriate are the participants in the speech act as well as the circumstances of the speech act to the successful performance of the speech act? If they are appropriate, the illocutionary act is felicitous. If otherwise, it is not.
- iii. Executive condition i.e. has the speech act been properly executed? If yes, then it is felicitous on this ground. If not, it is not felicitous.
- iv. Fulfillment condition i.e. what is the perlocutionary effect of the speech act? Is it the desired effect? If yes, it is also felicitous on this condition. If not it is not. When all these felicity conditions are met by an illocutionary act, then it is said to be felicitous. (see Osisanwo, 2003).

According to Malmkjaer (1991), the term semiotics is the study of signs and linguistics can be seen as the sub- discipline of semiotics which is particularly concerned with the nature of the linguistic sign. What is of relevance to linguistics from the discipline of semiotics are those of its conclusions about sign in general which are applicable to linguistic signs. The process of making and using signs is called semiosis. The concept 'Semiotics' originated from the American pragmatist philosopher, Pierce, although Saussure's study of the life of the sign of society referred to as Semiology, was better known in Europe for a considerable length of time (see Malmjaer, 1991). According to Eco (1984), there are two types of semiotics viz: specific and general. The scholar (Ibid) explains that a specific semiotics deals with a particular sign system, while general semiotics presents a theory of or searches for, that which is shared by all sign systems. Pierce's writings on signs is an example of general semiotics, while Halliday's (1978) work on language as a social semiotic is an example of a specific semiotics of interest to linguistics. Malmjaer (1991) avers that sign can be classified in three ways viz: icon, index, and symbol.

Two other important functional approaches to language study we need to review in this study are Discourse Analysis and Stylistics. According to Stubbs (1983:1), discourse is concerned with the

...organization of language above the sentence or above the clause and therefore... larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges and written texts.

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Basically, Stylistics is the branch of general linguistics that focuses on style, particularly in a work of literature. According to Freeman (1971:1), it is “a sub-discipline which started in the second half of the 20th century”. It can be seen as a logical extension of moves within literary criticism early in the 20th century, which we have earlier highlighted, to concentrate on studying texts rather than authors. Short and Carellin (1989:183) posit that the concept is a “linguistic approach to the study of the literary text. It thus embodies one essential part of the general course philosophy – that of combining language and literary study”. Widdowson (1975:3) believes that stylistics can serve as a means whereby literature and language as subjects can be a process of gradual approximation, move towards both linguistics and literary criticism and also a means whereby these disciplines can be pedagogically treated to yield different subjects.

Conclusion

In this discourse, we have looked at some linguistic theories across generations, from the early approaches to language study, initiated by grammarians and philosophers of ancient Greece, Rome and India from Plato, Socrates, to Hermogenes and Cratylus; through structuralism/behaviourism to the more modern functional approaches propounded by scholars such as J.R Firth and M.A.K. Halliday. It is pertinent to state that we have focused mainly on some of the linguistic theories across the ages in view of their relevance to the study, since the list is inexhaustible and the time and scope of a study of this nature may not be able to accommodate a detailed study of all the theories. Suffice it to say that there are theories in various other linguistic disciplines such as contrastive linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and cognitive linguistics, including theories of language development in children, such as the Empiricist and Nativist that revolve around scholars such as Bruner, Chomsky, Piaget, Skinner and Vygotsky.

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