

Role of Linguistics in Language Teaching

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Abstract

Linguists identify the distinctive features of language which make language stands apart from other means of communication. Linguists and Applied Linguists argue that language teachers should be aware of the linguistic theories formulated by both theoretical linguists and applied linguists. Language teachers act as communicators, educators, evaluators and agents of socialization. An awareness of the rules of linguistic theories place them ahead and the transaction process gets facilitated. This paper presents the role of Theoretical Linguists and Applied Linguists in theoretical formulations for language teachings. The paper also examines the theories of language acquisition. There have been discussions at the various levels about the role of linguistics in language teaching in the area of communication, in the inculcation of speaking skills and when the language teacher becomes educator, evaluator and agent of socialization.

Keywords: linguistics, sociolinguistics, structural linguistics, applied linguistics, language teaching, language acquisition

Introduction

Linguistics, the scientific study of language encompasses the form, its meaning and its variants in different contexts. Sound system, word and sentence structure, semantics and usage are of greater priority to the linguists. Language is the means of communication and self-expression. It is voluntary, symbolic and arbitrary. It has a specific structure. The system of language is an open-ended one. It is genetically and culturally transmitted. It is a set of social conventions and traditions. It is a set of habit. It is subject to change. Linguists identify these distinctive features of language which make language stands apart from other means of communication. These characteristics of language are specifically taken into consideration by linguists while formulating language learning theories.

Teachers, especially language teachers are communicators, educators, evaluators and agents of socialization. Linguists, both theoretical and applied linguists argue that language teachers essential to know the linguistic theories. An awareness of the principles of speech production, phonetic symbols, word formation, sentence structure, etc., bring them into an advantageous position. Linguistics helps teachers convey the origin of words and languages, historical implications and applications, and their up-to-date relevance, the structure and meaning of word/speech, structure of clause/ phrase/ sentences, written languages and variants - dialect/ regional/ class, the context in which certain words are used, etc. For instance, linguistics makes it possible for the language teachers to become aware of such patterns as the /-d/-s-/ alternation in words like evade and evasive, conclude and conclusive, certain accent placement regularities involving the suffixes written -y and -ies (Fillmore & Snow, 2002: 23).

Role of theoretical linguists in theoretical formulations

Theoretical linguists seek to study the nature of human language and how it is represented in adult native speaker knowledge. Linguistic theory aims to explain the nature of human language in terms of basic underlying principles. Linguists study and describe the structure of natural or human languages in order to gain a better understanding of

those principles. Phonetics and phonology, evoke the study of sound systems, sound patterns, and sound structures. Core areas of linguistic theory other than former one are morphology - the study of word structure and its connections with sound and sentence structure, syntax and semantics - the study of sentence structure and how it constrains meaning and interpretation, historical linguistics and language change, language acquisition (first and second language).

Significance of theories of language acquisition in language teaching

Acquisition usually refers to the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations. Language Acquisition is concerned with how a child acquires knowledge of language through input from the environment. Noam Chomsky suggests that language is an innate faculty - that is to say that men are born with a set of rules about language in their minds, which they refer to as the 'Universal Grammar'. The universal grammar is the basis upon which all human languages build. One is able to study language and determine the rules based on the patterns he hears and the patterns of other language. Behaviourist theories, the innateness hypothesis, social interactionism, etc, are some of the theories of child language acquisition. The theories of language acquisition distinguish that of L1 and L2 as well.

Grammar is a device for generating grammatical sentences (Chomsky, 1962). It contributes to the art of writing. Language can be broken down into clear classes or category. System of languages can be analyzed by using the categories like prescriptive grammar, descriptive grammar, generative grammar, communicative grammar, etc. Prescriptive grammar helps to think about language as incorrect or correct or as good or bad. Descriptive grammar is concerned with describing and understanding the linguistic behavior of community, without judging.

Role of Applied Linguists in theoretical formulations

Applied linguists develop theories and models, mediate and implement theories, analyze language for pedagogical applications, carry out research into learning and teaching. For example, structural linguistics is an offshoot of applied linguistics when theories of behaviorism deeply influenced the American linguists of the time. Structural linguists believed that the best way to master a new language was through repetitive practice with various language structures or sentence patterns. Learning a language required the learner to form “speaking habits” that conformed to the structure of the target language.

To a learner, the native language and the target language have separate linguistic systems. Both should be kept apart so that the students’ native language interferes as little as possible with the students’ attempts to acquire the target language. The major objective of language teaching should be for students to attain the structural patterns (phonetic structure of word, formation of lexical items, formation and constituents of sentence and to familiarize / learn vocabulary afterward.

Speech is more basic to language than the written form. The ‘natural order’ – the order children follow when learning their native language attracts more attention than the class room mode. Acquisition of basic linguistic skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing is also paramount in language learning, which require training.

Role of Linguistics in communication during language teaching

Knowledge in linguistics helps a language teacher to communicate with his students in the most fruitful way. During communication teachers know how to structure their own language output with utmost clarity and devise strategies in order to comprehend the responses of students. Without comprehending their responses effective transaction and improvisation of strategies is impossible. This becomes all the more important when ones’ classrooms are so heterogeneous with diverse dialects and culture. A knowledge in linguistics becomes useful for the language teachers to see their

discourses in the light of their own cultures and backgrounds. When students use a dialect different from that of the teacher, teachers can employ transaction techniques without hurting the confidence of the students.

Role of linguistics in inculcating speaking skills

The study of linguistics makes the language teachers aware how languages can change and how dialects vary in their phonological rules. This provides teachers with insights into the pronunciation patterns of learners in a classroom. The teachers can draw an explanation for the consistent difficulties that language students experience in speaking. The learning of a second language and foreign language is influenced by one's mother tongue and the dialectical variations influence in a different way. The pronunciation of certain phonemes in the mother tongue obstructs the way the students pronounce certain other phonemes in the foreign language. Moreover, the teachers also need to be careful about their own pronunciation in the target language which should not be influenced by either his mother tongue or his dialect. For example, an Arab native finds it difficult to pronounce the voiceless bilabial stop 'p', but he will be comfortable with voiced bilabial stop 'b'.

Place of articulation and manner of articulation are important to a language teacher while helping the students acquire speaking skill. Place of articulation refers to where in the mouth the sounds are produced and how the articulators (Lips, tongue, teeth) are positioned during production of sounds. For example, Bilabial (Bi means two) when both lips come together and touch each other e.g. [b] in bag and [m] in man.

Role of Linguistics when teacher becomes an agent of socialization

The teachers are true agents of socialization since major chunk of their hours in their career is reserved for interaction and communication. An awareness about sociolinguistic aspects help the teachers to understand non-standard dialects and sociolects. The teachers can consider pragmatic aspects of language also when they

interact with their students. They should shape the classroom environment most congenial to the students so that optimal level of learning can be achieved.

As a member of the cultural community, children learn the everyday practices, the system of values and beliefs, and the means and manners of communication from the community to which they belong. The process of socialization starts from home. At school this continues. There is no problem of mismatching when the cultures of both home and school are alike. It does not pose a hindrance to the continuous process. In fact, this continuity gifts the children with the characteristics of educated individuals.

Role of Linguistics in pedagogy of language teaching

knowledge in linguistics help teachers to choose the proper educational materials to give activities at the right level for the learner concerned. The teachers can rightly assess the accomplishments of students and their cognitive obstacles to learning. They can sort out the problems of language learning which need to be given attention immediately. The teachers should be aware the language development and its various stages, the linguistic, cultural and social backdrop of the students. By the time the children go to school they have acquired the grammar of their L1 and they add on to their fund of vocabulary and other literacy skills from school. Children have to pass along different phases of language development before blooming full into mature members of the speech community.

Role of linguistics in evaluation process by a language teacher

Learners are at different levels. They are of different attitudes and aptitudes also. Such differences require different level of treatment. The criteria for assessing different level of learners can also be different. The uniqueness of each individual should be borne in mind at the time of evaluation. The knowledge of linguistics can assist the language teachers in this area. The individual differences can be considered and transactional strategies can be devised catering to these individual differences.

Some other important concepts on language teaching and Linguistics

Theories of learning, structural methods, Grammar Translation method, audio-lingual method, functional method, oral approach/ situational language learning, directed practice, interactive method, direct method, series method, communicative language teaching, language immersion. Preparation of teaching materials for standard language, classical language, spoken language, newspaper language, etc.; Preparation of teaching materials for different target groups; mentally challenged students, Autism spectrum Disorders (ASD). Teaching aids: Use of aids in language learning; Use of language laboratory; Technical aids; Computer aided language teaching and learning; Teaching or learning phonology, morphology, and syntax of a language using computer. Language learning games; Virtual Education Models and Material for normal children and other children; Remedial Teaching.

Conclusion

The dual relationship between linguistics and language teaching is important for language pedagogy. The continuing developments in linguistic theory and in language teaching theory as well as the constant changes in the language itself demand the permanent study of language and the relations between linguistic theory and language teaching or language pedagogy.

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