

PAPER 7

HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

It is a fact that language undergoes a change by time. This change becomes apparent when we read texts a few centuries old. We also know that English has been changing in its sounds. The change in sound is termed as 'phonological change'. There are also changes of form, e.g. we no longer use the pronunciation 'thine' or the accompanying verb forms ending in 'st'. These are called 'morphological changes'. All these lead us to the conclusion that all languages alter more readily in sounds than in forms and syntax.

There are two methods of language classification:

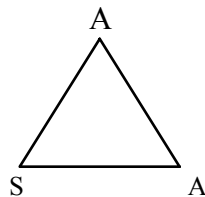
1. Typological method (types)
2. Genological method (origin)

TYPOLOGICAL METHOD: From the beginning of historical linguistics, attempts were made to classify languages by their types rather than by their origin and relationships. In 1818, August Von Schlegel proposed a typological classification of languages which was widely followed and elaborated through the nineteenth century. It is still very popular.

According to Von Humboldt, typological classification of languages has three divisions, namely

1. Analytic or Isolating
2. Synthetic or fusion or inflecting
3. Agglutinative or Affixive

The above three divisions of the typological classification of the word structure of languages and the way in which phonological structures and grammatical structures are related in word forms. These three types are arranged in a triangle, each language could be placed at some appropriate point in after a statistical analysis of its word structure pattern.



Features of analytic, synthetic and agglutinating are usually to be found in most languages, though in proportions.

- (1) In the analytic type there is no inflection of Chinese and in Latin mere prepositions, conjunctions and many adverbs like since, from, as, when, now, seldom, etc. are determined by their syntactic relation with the rest of the sentences in which they occur.
- (2) In the fusional type of the word, the stem changes and if the change is removed the whole semantic of the word changes in given context, e.g. geese, men, mice, women, etc. Latin, Greek and Sanskrit are the most obvious examples of the fusional/synthetic type.
- (3) In the agglutinating type, a morph or an affix when merged to the stem can be neatly separated from the stem Turkish, Japanese, etc. are typically agglutinative languages of the world, with Turkish generally considered the purest example of such a language.

(Eskimo and some Red-Indian languages are said to be very long and morphologically complex, and to contain numerous bound morphemes).

- (i) Isolating/Analytic -
 - (a) Chinese
 - (b) Vietnamese
- (ii) Synthetic/Fusional
 - (a) Sanskrit
 - (b) Arabic
 - (c) Greek
- (iii) Agglutinating
 - (a) Turkish
 - (b) Eskimo
 - (c) Japanese

According to Lehman "inflectional languages were held to represent the highest stage of evolution, and the most perfect form of human communication yet devised."

As far as English is concerned, it is, in fact, a fairly mixed type of language in respect of the three types, and each can be illustrated from English.

The three fold 'Humboldtian typological classification' was rather looked down upon by the linguists during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The most complete typology based on grammatical semantic criteria is of pink. The definition of the word is not complete. All definitions given till the modern era are not the best. Hence, the use of a poorly defined word seriously reduces the value of typological classification.

In spite of the above given definition it is apparent that these cannot be water tight compartments among the respective languages. Some amount of overlapping will always persist.