

**PAPER 6 (DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS)  
TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR AND ITS WEAKNESSES**

By traditional grammar is meant basically the Aristotelian orientation toward the nature of language as exemplified in the work of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the speculative works of the medieval, and the prescriptive approach of the 18th century grammarians. The 'Traditional Grammar' has a long tradition with it. There are ideas about sentence structure deriving from Aristotle and Plato, ideas about the parts of speech deriving from the stoic grammarians, ideas about meaning stemming from the scholastic debates of the Middle Ages, ideas about the relationship between language and mind deriving from seventeenth century philosophical controversies between rationalists and empiricists, ideas about correctness in language coming from the eighteenth century grammars of English, and ideas about the history of language deriving from the nineteenth century emphasis on comparative philology.

It is the most widespread and influential and understood method of discussing languages in the world; fairly well understood and consistently applied by the teachers. Traditional grammar distinguishes between rational, emotional, automatic and purely conventional type of discourse in theory if not in grammatical practice. It gives fairly a thorough and consistent analysis of the declarative sentence. It is the vehicle by means of which ordinary students and scholars have mastered many languages for centuries.

In the words of Chomsky, "I think that we have much to learn from a careful study of what was achieved by the universal grammarians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." [It seems to me, in fact that contemporary linguistics would do well to take their concept of a language as a point of departure for a current work].

**WEAKNESSES OF TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR**

1. Traditional grammar is inadequate and full of shortcomings that paved the way for so many models of modern grammar. Since it is mainly based on Indo-European classical languages like Latin, Sanskrit, and Greek, etc., it provides a poor model for the grammars of languages that differ from them.

2. It does not, adequately distinguish between all the linguistic levels- phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and descriptive.

3. It is normative and prescriptive rather than explicit and descriptive. Its rules are illogical, it is inconsistent and inadequate as a description of actual language in use. It neglects not only the contemporary uses but also the functional and social varieties of language. Its approach is diachronic (historical) rather than synchronic (contemporary). Fries in his book "The structure of English" (1952) challenges the traditional grammars by calling them "not insightful", "pre-scientific", "prescriptive" and having a "literary bias". There may be about 200 definitions of the sentence, yet they are not able to differentiate between

the dog is barking.

the barking dog.

4. Traditional grammar says that a 'noun' is "the name of a person, place or thing", yet cannot include 'blue' and 'red' in the list of nouns though they are the names of colors.
5. Traditional grammar uses meaning as the primary tool of linguistic analysis. Total meaning of a language cannot be analyzed in the present stage of our knowledge. Meaning is a complex entity for the understanding of which a formal description of a language should form the base. Furthermore, it fails to indicate clearly which meaning it is going to treat:

Total meaning

Social meaning

Linguistic meaning

Lexical meaning

Structural meaning

notional meaning

referential meaning

contextual meaning

6. It gives priority to the written form of language and ignores the priority of spoken-form. It does not even cover the whole range of written form and is restricted to specific kinds of writing form, especially the formal styles.
7. General conception of the nature of language in aesthetic terms is provided by it. Ignoring the fact of the change in language, it considers grammar something like Godgift.
8. It cannot resolve the ambiguity existing in the grammatical forms. Its methods are inaccurate, incomplete and inconsistent, and the descriptions are inexplicit and intuitive.

Analyzing the weaknesses of the traditional grammar John Lyons states, "The traditional grammarian tended to assume, not only that the written language was more fundamental than the spoken, but also that a particular form of the written, namely the literary language, written and spoken; and that it was his task, as a grammarian, to preserve this form of language from corruption.

In this way traditional grammar is informal, unscientific, contradictory, inexplicit, prescriptive, uneconomical, and unmethodical. It lacks scientific accuracy, objectivity, and precision. It ignores the contemporary uses and all the varieties of languages.

## **STRATIFICATIONAL GRAMMAR**

Stratificational grammar is associated with the name of Sidney Lamb. According to Sidney Lamb, language does not have only two levels of deep and surface structure but a series of levels or strata, each with a different kind of structure. This grammar has come to be known as 'Stratificational Grammar', as one of its chief feature is its treatment of linguistic structure as comprising several structural layers called 'strata' by Lamb. According to him, "A language is a complex network of sound-meaning relationships. These relationships can be analyzed in terms of a series of code like systems. Each of these systems has its own syntax or tactics."

According to Lamb, therefore all natural languages may be said to have three major strata:

Semiology

Grammar

Phonology

Semiology is concerned with meaning and phonology with speech. Grammar is a link between the two.

In stratificational grammar a sentence is realized as a string of sounds, a tree of morphemes and a constellation of meanings. The basic relationship in this model is that of representation or realization. It links the elements of one stratum with those of the stratum below. Lamb's "Outline of Stratificational Grammar" gives the basic features of this model. The structure - the boy caught the bird - can be analyzed in the following way in terms of this system:

		Declarative		Past	
The-----	Thing-----	Agent-		Do	Goal---Thing---The
	Animate			Catch	Animate
Adult	Human	Male			
	Boy				Bird