

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN LINGUISTIC THEORIES

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Abstract. This article examines the development of modern linguistic theories and their contributions to the understanding of language. The study focuses on four main approaches: structuralism, generative grammar, functional linguistics, and cognitive linguistics. Using a qualitative research method based on a systematic literature review, the study analyzes major academic works to identify key ideas and differences between these theories. The findings show that linguistic theories have evolved from a focus on language structure to an emphasis on meaning, communication, and cognitive processes. While structuralism introduced the idea of language as a system, generative grammar emphasized the role of innate language abilities. Functional linguistics emphasized the importance of context and communication, while cognitive linguistics emphasized the connection between language and human thought and experience. The study shows that each theory offers valuable insights and, together, they provide a more complete understanding of language. This study is useful for students, teachers, and researchers who aim to better understand the theoretical and practical aspects of linguistics.

Keywords: modern linguistics, linguistic theories, structuralism, generative grammar, functional linguistics.

Introduction.

Language is one of the most important means of human communication. It allows people to exchange ideas, express their feelings, and build relationships. Without language, societies would be difficult to develop, because communication is at the heart of all human activity. Over time, scientists have tried to explain how language is structured, how it is learned, and how it functions in society. As a result, various linguistic theories have been developed, each of which offers a unique perspective on language. In the early stages, language was studied mainly in terms of grammar and historical development. However, with the development of science and technology, linguistics also began to change. Researchers began to view language not only as a system of rules, but also as a dynamic and complex phenomenon related to human consciousness and social interaction. This shift helped linguistics become a more systematic and independent field of study. Modern linguistic theories emerged mainly in the 20th century, when linguistics became more scientific and interdisciplinary. Scholars began to draw on methods from psychology, sociology, and cognitive science to better understand language. They explored important questions such as how people acquire language, how meaning is constructed, and how context influences communication. These questions led to the development of several influential theories. Some of the most important approaches include structuralism, generative grammar, functional linguistics, and cognitive linguistics. Each of these theories focuses on different aspects of language. Some emphasize structure, others focus on mental processes, and still others emphasize the role of social context and meaning. Together, they provide a broader and more complete understanding of language. This article aims to examine the development of modern linguistic theories by analyzing their main ideas,

differences, and contributions. It also seeks to show how these theories are related and how they help us better understand language in theory and practice.

Methodology.

This study mainly uses a qualitative research method that focuses on a systematic literature review. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore and compare different language theories in depth without using numerical data. The study is based on the analysis of well-known academic books, journal articles, and key texts in the field of linguistics. To ensure reliability, sources were selected according to the following criteria: relevance to contemporary linguistic theories, academic credibility, and influence in the field. Classic works as well as recent research were included to provide both historical and contemporary perspectives. The research process involved several steps. First, key texts related to structuralism, generative grammar, functional linguistics, and cognitive linguistics were carefully reviewed. Second, the key concepts and principles of each theory were identified and summarized. Third, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences between these approaches, particularly in terms of how they explain language structure, meaning, and use. In addition, the study used elements of both descriptive and analytical methods to interpret the data. The descriptive method helped to present each theory in a clear and organized manner, while the analytical method supported critical comparison and evaluation (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007). Overall, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive and systematic understanding of how modern linguistic theories have developed over time and how they contribute to language learning.

Results.

The findings show that modern linguistic theories have gone through several important stages:

1. Structuralism

Structuralism is one of the oldest modern linguistic theories. It was introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure, who defined language as a system of signs consisting of a signifier and a referent (Saussure, 1916). Structuralism focuses on:

- Language as a structured system
- Relationships between linguistic elements
- Synchronic analysis of language

This approach helped to establish linguistics as an independent scientific discipline (Trask, 1999).

2. Generative grammar

Generative grammar, developed by Noam Chomsky, marked a major shift in linguistic theory. Chomsky argued that humans have an innate ability to acquire language, which is known as universal grammar (Chomsky, 1957). Key features include:

- Focus on syntax and sentence structure
- The idea of deep and surface structures
- Language as a mental process

This theory has influenced much of the subsequent research, linking linguistics with psychology and cognitive science (Fromkin et al., 2014).

3. Functional linguistics

Functional linguistics emphasizes the role of language in communication. According to Halliday, language is a social semiotic system that performs different functions in context (Halliday, 1978). Key ideas:

- Language is shaped by its use in context
- Meaning is central to linguistic analysis
- Focus on speech and communication

This approach has made linguistics more practical and applicable to real-life communication (Crystal, 2003).

4. Cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics studies the relationship between language and the human mind. It reflects how people think and understand the world (Lakoff, 1987). Key concepts:

- Language is linked to knowledge and experience
- The importance of metaphor and conceptual structures
- Meaning is based on mental processes

This theory has had a major influence on modern linguistic research (Evans & Green, 2006).

Discussion.

The development of modern linguistic theories shows a clear shift in focus over time. While early approaches such as structuralism focused on the formal structure of language, later theories emphasized mental processes and social context. Generative grammar introduced the idea that language is partly innate, while functional linguistics emphasized the importance of communication and context. Cognitive linguistics further expanded this view by linking language to human thought and experience. Each theory has its strengths and limitations. Structuralism provides a strong analytical framework but neglects context. Generative grammar effectively explains syntax but can neglect social factors. Functional and cognitive approaches offer more realistic representations of language use but can be less formalized (Crystal, 2003; Evans & Green, 2006). Overall, these theories complement each other and contribute to a more complete understanding of language.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, modern linguistic theories have gone through several stages, each introducing new perspectives on language. From structural analysis to cognitive interpretation, linguistics has become a complex and interdisciplinary field. Understanding these theories is important for both theoretical research and practical applications, especially in education and communication. Future research can continue to integrate these approaches to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of language.

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