

**Basics of Language Science**  
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**Lecture 1**  
**Introduction**

Welcome to this class and today I welcome you to this course, as I planned to give you a detailed synopsis of what we are going to do in this course. As you know this is called Basics of Language Science, in this course we are going to talk about language and how we study language, at the same time we will talk about, what is it that we study when we study language?

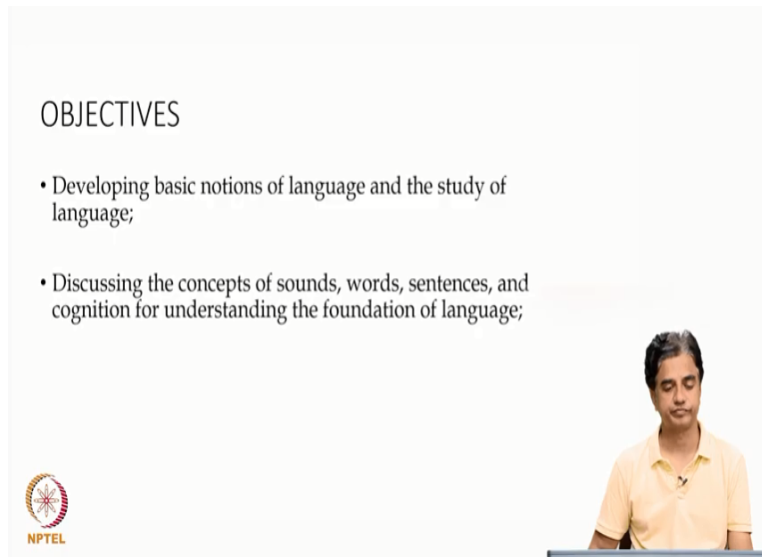
We will go into details of these questions in this course and introduce to you this course about language, this course on language. So, let me start one by one and give you an idea about this course, pretty soon we will have a discussion on what is language, what is it that we study when we study language? Why is it called linguistics and what is linguistics all about, all these questions will be discussed in this course.

Language is a unique thing; language is unique in many ways but the most important part that makes language unique for all of us is the fact that it is available to everybody. All of us speak language, all of us speak many languages and at least many people speak two to three languages. We wanted to know what happens that people learn and what happens when people learn multiple languages. How does it happen that people start speaking multiple languages?

So, my basic point right in the beginning of this course for you is to look at you start thinking about language, you begin thinking about language and you will come to a lot of questions, we will deal with all these questions in this course and therefore, we call this course Basics of Language Science.

We treat language as a scientific object of inquiry in this course and will show you various different aspects of those of the scientific inquiry into the study of language as well. So, let me take you through this and then we come back to some of these questions again.



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**OBJECTIVES**

- Developing basic notions of language and the study of language;
- Discussing the concepts of sounds, words, sentences, and cognition for understanding the foundation of language;

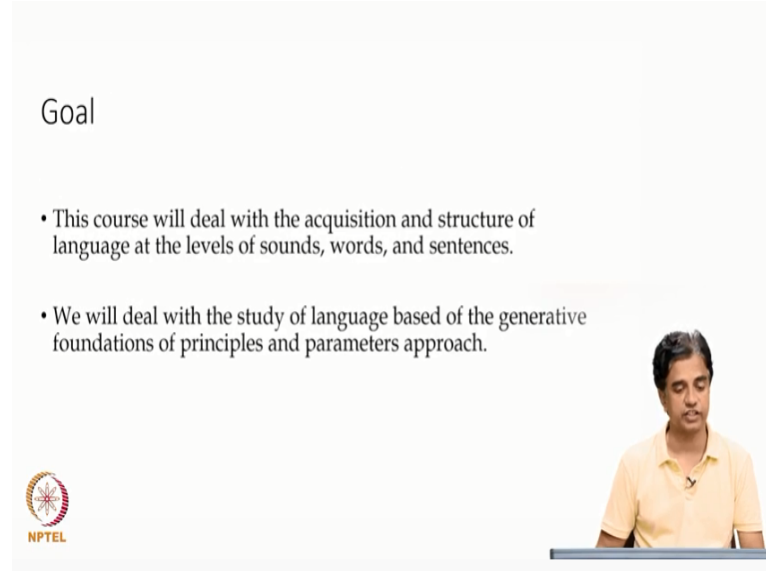
 

The primary objective of this course is the following. I have put it in two parts and it will help you look forward; it will help you understand what we look forward to in this course. We are going to develop our basic notions of language and as I mentioned before, what is it that we study when we study language, this is one of the main objectives. So, we will try to get introduced to the study of language that is the one part of the objective for this course.

The second part is we will, are having looked at that we will look at the concepts of sounds, words, sentences and cognition for understanding the foundation of language, that is how languages have sounds, how we get words from sounds, how words combine together to make sentence and then at that level we will discuss various other constituents of a sentence and finally and even before that we will start locating, situating these discussions in to the study of human mind and its cognitive aspects.



So, we will look at all these things with the idea that we want to understand, basic foundations of study of language. So, the goal is going to be study of language, the main objectives are these two.

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Goal

- This course will deal with the acquisition and structure of language at the levels of sounds, words, and sentences.
- We will deal with the study of language based on the generative foundations of principles and parameters approach.

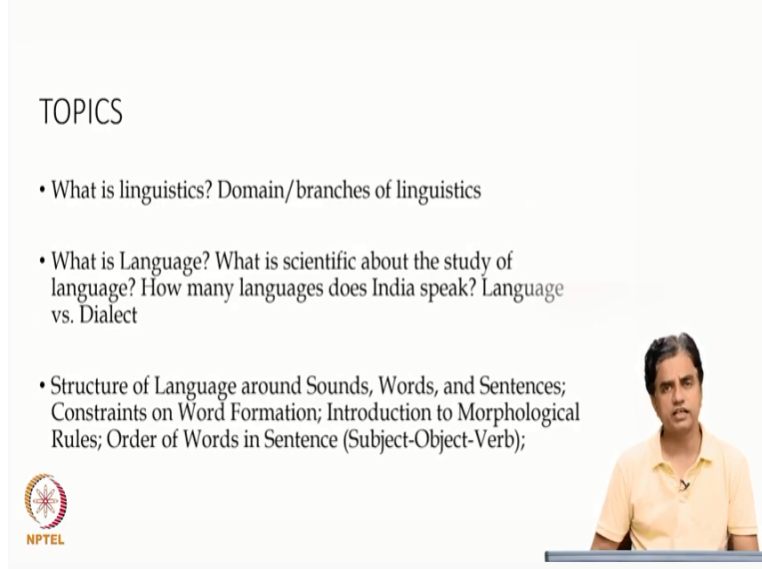
 

And when we look at goals in particular, I want to describe this one more time that we will look at the acquisition and structure of language at the level of sounds, words and sentences.

So, let me locate it one more time, basic parts of language are sounds, words and sentences, we will look at the acquisition and structure of all these three things, which eventually constitutes language and this is what we are going to be dealing with in this course and then finally we will be looking at all these aspects of language, all these ingredients of language, components of language which is based in the generative foundations of principles and parameters approach.



So, we look at, we take generative foundation as the theoretical apparatus to help us explain acquisition and structure of sounds, words and sentences for our understanding of the basics that is the foundations of language, this is what we are aiming at doing in this entire course.

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TOPICS

- What is linguistics? Domain/branches of linguistics
- What is Language? What is scientific about the study of language? How many languages does India speak? Language vs. Dialect
- Structure of Language around Sounds, Words, and Sentences; Constraints on Word Formation; Introduction to Morphological Rules; Order of Words in Sentence (Subject-Object-Verb);

Moving slightly further to give you a more in-depth idea about how we will progress in this course, broadly is the following. We will start talking about what is language, we will begin from that point, as I mentioned language, we are treating language as a scientific object of inquiry in this course and we will look at language with that perspective and then we will deal with what it is.

So that will take us to the questions of what makes, what are the constituents of language? What is it that we call language, how do we use that, how does it come to us, that is how do we acquire that and what, how the study of these things becomes linguistics?

So, we will look at these things, we will also look at certain geographical and sociological aspects of language to situate it in the real world in terms of we will look at how many languages are spoken in India, what do we mean, when we talk about language or dialect, in other words many questions that come to your mind when you start thinking about language.

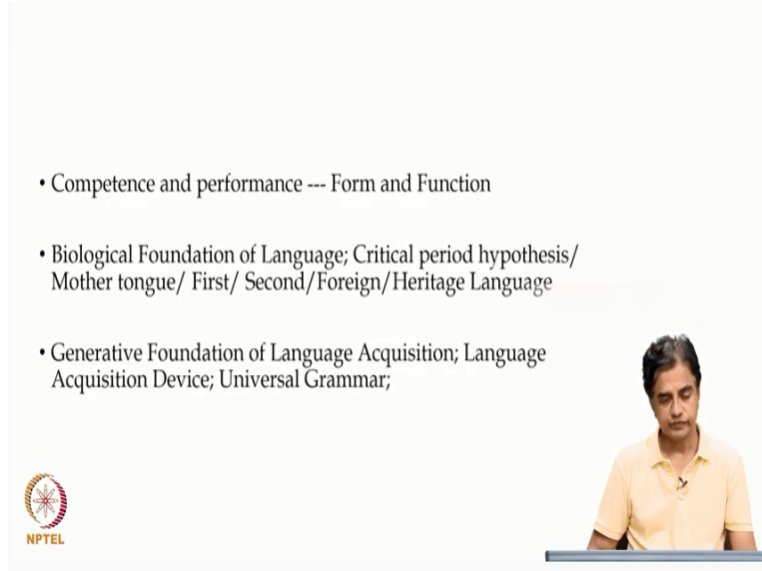
We will try to answer almost all of them or at least most of them at various levels in this course and when you go through the videos and different parts of this course you will be able to answer most of those questions on your own.

So, I invite you to look at those things seriously and then develop your own understanding based on these discussions. When we start talking about the structure, we are again going to be looking at beginning from sounds to words to sentences, we will look at constraints on word formation, we will look at how certain rules operate when we are looking at words.

How certain words that are possible without even a meaning and certain combinations of sounds are not allowed for making of a sentence, for making of a word, certain combination of sounds are not allowed for making a word, we will get into the details of these things and then we will go to the formation of sentence and we will start looking at grammatical relations like subject, object with reference to verbs and then we will look at various other parts and their arrangements in a sentence, which is also called mental computation.

So, we will use the word computation several times in this course and I want to clarify with a note here computation in this, in the context of language means combinatorial rules, combinatorial rules and the way they operate in the human mind is called computation. So, various constituents and components of a sentence come together in a particular way, they combine together in a particular way and the entire process of, process and combination are called computation that is what we will discuss in this course.

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- Competence and performance --- Form and Function
- Biological Foundation of Language; Critical period hypothesis/ Mother tongue/ First/ Second/Foreign/Heritage Language
- Generative Foundation of Language Acquisition; Language Acquisition Device; Universal Grammar;

We will go and look at competence and performance distinction that is form and function. As we see there are two parts of language, when we start looking at language; one is the formal properties of language, the other is functional properties of language. Formal properties are about the structural aspects of language and functional properties are about the use of language in the real world, in the real society.

Our knowledge, the way we acquire language, constitutes in such a way that we know how to use it, we know how to speak the language, but we do not know everything about what we know, what I mean is, the knowledge of language is dormant in us, it does not develop in an obvious fashion, it develops effortlessly and such a thing is called language competence and our capacity to use them in a variety of ways and context in the society is called language performance.

So, these two terms are very critical, when we look at language and particularly two specific aspects of language, which are formal properties of language and functional properties of language, then we are going to be looking at biological foundations of language in the sense that what is connection with biology, how is language connected with biology.

Is language part of our genes, we do not know much about it, how do we acquire language, which part of human mind is responsible for acquisition and we will look at something called critical period hypothesis, which is a very important juncture in understanding why as a child it is so easy to learn language but when we grow up as an adult it becomes more and more difficult.

At this point let me add a phrase, we often say it, do not attempt this is not a child's play, I wanted use this phrase in the context of language that learning of language is child's play in a literal sense of the word, please pay attention to this the way we acquire language so effortlessly as a child and when we, the way we acquire language as a child is very different from how we learn language as an adult.



Acquiring language as child is effortless, whereas learning a language as an adult requires lot of efforts and still the distinction between the two is so obvious that they result into situations like mother tongue, first language, foreign language, heritage language we will look at the distinction of these terms as well with respect to biological foundations of language in this course.

Like generative foundation of language acquisition is going to be the basis for understanding how people understood the learning of language before generative foundation came into place, that is there was a time when language was considered a matter of habit formation, learning of language, our understanding about learning of language was rooted in psychological foundations that we learn a language through habit formation.

Much later around 1957 this which is the almost the beginning year of this generative enterprise changed the things a lot to a great deal and then we know with great, in great details about the role of human mind in learning language and we know a lot about it that it is not habit formation, it is way more than that. So, we will look at those things, we will look at what we know about Language Acquisition Device which is a hypothetical device in the human mind and we will talk about Universal Grammar.

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- X-bar Theory (Specifiers vs. Complements, Arguments vs. Adjuncts);
- Theta-Theory; Theta Role Assignment;
- Case Theory (Abstract, Inherent, and Morphological Case, Exceptional Case Marking, Nominative-Accusative vs. Ergative-Absolutive patterns);
- Binding Theory (Conditions A, B, and C, Role of Structural Relationships such as C-command, Locality, Binding Domains);



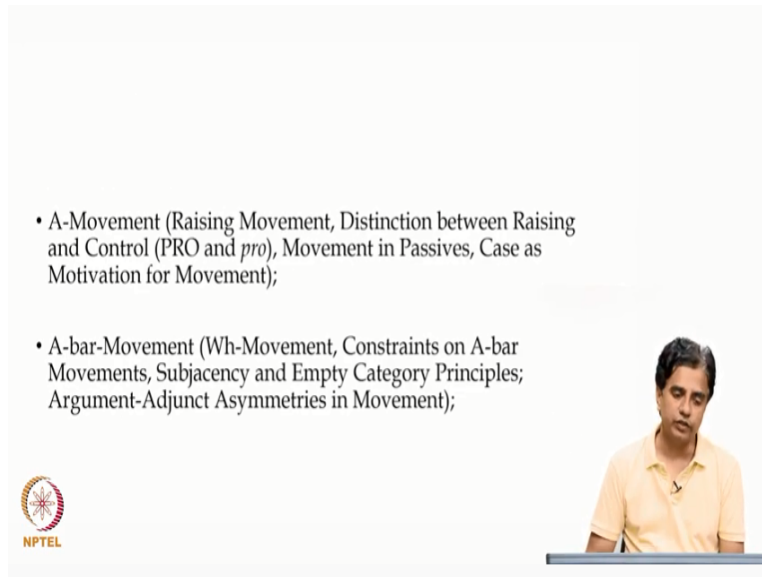
There are certain theoretical tools which help us analyze understanding of language and we will begin with those theoretical tools as well in the latter half of this course, which are also known as different modules of this theoretical apparatus, they are like X bar Theory, Theta Theory, Case Theory, Binding Theory and we will go into.

We will go into the details of these tools first to understand these things as tools and then we learn to apply these things for us to be able to analyze different components of language and we will get to, through these tools and through this theoretical apparatus we will learn that language learning is not just effortless what we learn in a through our subconscious is a very complex system and this helps us understand language as a rule-governed system.

It is a patterned governed system, the more we look at it in detail the more we know that language is not random, language is not arbitrary, though there is a role of the arbitrariness of, arbitrariness in the language itself is not arbitrary. These are the things we will get to clarify for ourselves in our pursuit of understanding the basics of language science.



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- A-Movement (Raising Movement, Distinction between Raising and Control (PRO and *pro*), Movement in Passives, Case as Motivation for Movement);
- A-bar-Movement (Wh-Movement, Constraints on A-bar Movements, Subjacency and Empty Category Principles; Argument-Adjunct Asymmetries in Movement);

We will look at several other aspects of these theoretical details and they will equip us with understanding how to analyze language with tools that will help us look inside language. So, I will tell you more about these things as we go on, at this point let us understand when we learn a language, we learn it effortlessly.

That is as a child learning is so effortless, language is so unique it comes so naturally to us that we look at it in terms of, it is not a matter of merely habit formation, it is way more than that and it is a very complex system about such complexity we know everything but we do not know that we know all those complexities. Understanding these aspects will help us deal with all these complexities of language and develop a better understanding of language in a scientific way, Thank you.