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Theory of Language and Theory of Linguistics

Abstract

An analysis of linguistic literature shows the differences in the use of the terms "theory of language", "linguistic theory" and "theory of linguistics". These different types of theories also imply different measures of the adequacy of theories, as well as different possibilities of the non-linguistic (in particular, psychological) reality of theories vs. the linguistic reality of "non-language".

Since linguists are very busy establishing the subtleties of the use and meaning of a wide variety of names that are very far from linguistics, it would not be a bad idea to dig around in our own field and try to figure out what we mean by the aforementioned terms of theoretical linguistics.

The theory of language is a system of premises and explanations of what language is, how it is structured, how it arose, how it functions, and why it is used in one way or another.

Keywords: *theory of language, linguistic theory, theory of linguistics, extra-linguistic reality of linguistic theory, linguistic reality of language*

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Dil nəzəriyyəsi və dilçilik nəzəriyyəsi

Xülasə

Dilçilik ədəbiyyatının təhlili “dil nəzəriyyəsi”, “dilçilik nəzəriyyəsi” və “dilçiliyin nəzəriyyəsi” terminlərinin istifadəsində fərqləri göstərir. Bu müxtəlif növ nəzəriyyələr həm də nəzəriyyələrin adekvatlığının müxtəlif ölçülərini, eləcə də nəzəriyyələrin qeyri-lingvistik (xüsusən də psixoloji) reallığının “qeyri-dil” lingvistik reallığına qarşı müxtəlif imkanlarını nəzərdə tutur.

Dilçi alimlər dilçilikdən çox uzaq olan geniş çeşidli adların işlənməsi və mənasının incəliklərini təsbit etməklə çox məşğul olduqlarından, nəzəri dilçiliyin yuxarıda qeyd etdiyimiz terminləri ilə nəyi nəzərdə tutduğunuzu öz sahəmizdə araşdırmaq pis fikir olmazdı.

Dil nəzəriyyəsi dilin nə olduğunu, necə qurulduğunu, necə yarandığını, necə fəaliyyət göstərdiyini və nə üçün bu və ya digər şəkildə istifadə edildiyini izah edən əsaslar və izahatlar sistemidir.

Açar sözlər: *dilin nəzəriyyəsi, dil nəzəriyyəsi, dilçilik nəzəriyyəsi, dil nəzəriyyəsinin dildənkənar reallığı, dilin lingvistik reallığı*

Introduction

The main distinguishing feature of the theory of language is the search for the essence of language; this is what E.S.Kubryakova has been doing all her life. Her posthumously published monograph (Kubryakova, 2012) has a Proustian nostalgic title and suggests that ideas about the essence of language are available to us from birth, accompany us throughout our lives, but we – alas – do not always recognize them or formulate them adequately.

The issues that occupy the theory of language have a long history. Today, in an era of heightened interest in the anthropology of language, the following problems are among the most pressing (Stroik, Putnam, 2013, pp. 156-157):

- ✓ what is the "language faculty" of man (Humboldt);
- ✓ how is this faculty acquired (Plato);
- ✓ how is this faculty applied in practice (Descartes);
- ✓ how is knowledge of language "implemented" in the brain (Broca);
- ✓ how did this knowledge arise with the development of the human species (Darwin);
- ✓ how was this evolution realized in a relatively short period of time (Hornstein);
- ✓ what does the optimal architecture of the language faculty look like (Turing);
- ✓ what does the optimal "computing system" for the language faculty look like (Galileo);
- ✓ how is this computing system put into operation (Reuland);
- ✓ how is this computing system maintained in a state of operability (Boeckx);
- ✓ how does this computing system achieve or allow its goals to be achieved (Hinzen).

Research

Language itself as a subject of reflection seems temptingly accessible, and therefore language theory is not always the occupation of professional linguists alone. In particular, there are many psychological theories of language (psychology of language), philosophical theories of language; there are logical, theological (Schmitter, 1996, p. 9), mathematical theories of language. Each of these professional slants (“versions”) has not only its initial assumptions, but also techniques of demonstration and reflection, sometimes very far from what we are accustomed to in professional linguistics, assimilated within the framework of today's educational programs in linguistics.

Everyday theories of language are not as harmless as they seem at first glance. Today, as before, we have to deal with the social consequences of inadequate ideas and prejudices concerning “underdeveloped” and “inferior” languages (Napoli, 1996, p. 5).

When engaged in theorizing, a scientist often breaks away from everyday problems associated exclusively with the collection and analysis of materials essential to his science. The main goal of a linguist is to discover the unity of heterogeneous phenomena (similarities and differences that are not always obvious), and cause-and-effect relationships between observed phenomena. No less important and responsible is the task of confirming or refuting the data itself – against the background of the “pre-knowledge” that the researcher already has at the moment. For example, some theories were put forward long before they were confirmed by a large amount of factual material. Let us recall the hypothesis about the relationship of Sanskrit with European languages, put forward by W. Jones long before the creation of the comparative-historical methodology and grammar of Indo-European languages, but only on the basis of a comparison of a small number of examples (Koerner, 1989, p.377). Some unexpected facts are recognized as something that does not refute the explanations already proposed, but requires cosmetic clarification of the theory. Others are hushed up or declared unimportant (Wardhaugh, 1995, p. 9).

Many of the meanings of the term theory of language are included in the understanding of the terms linguistic theory and theory of linguistics.

Linguistics as a professional activity is concerned with the collection, description and explanation of linguistic data (Lehmann, 1978, p. 426). Explanation and prediction as the sphere of one of the sections of linguistics, called theoretical linguistics, consists in the advancement and testing of theories relating to different areas of language. For example: how do linguistic forms receive their – linguistic and extralinguistic – interpretations (Bartsch, 1979, p. 23). Such theories differ in their empirical base, their methodological (“philosophical”) base and their goals. But the main “supertask” of theoretical linguistics is to provide answers to questions such as: why and in what way are languages so different and why are they all so similar to each other? (Perlmutter, 1980, p. 195).

The core of linguistic theory, according to professional linguists, especially cognitive linguists, is represented by discussions of how a person learns and stores grammatical structures, how mental representations of these structures may look, and how they are combined with lexical information when creating and interpreting statements (Stolterfoht, Featherston, 2012, p. 7).

As an analysis of the use of the term linguistic theory shows, it is sometimes very difficult to separate the two meanings. The distinction, which seems logically plausible, is not always unambiguous in the usage of linguists.

One of the main goals of linguistic theory has always been to identify and demonstrate the system underlying linguistic phenomena – that constant which over time leads to a change in the system itself “Theory equips us to meet not only those cases which we have encountered before, but also any possible case”

Linguistic theories are usually called:

✓ theoretical constructions invented or in circulation within the framework of linguistics as an occupation of linguists (i.e. theories in linguistics); the degree of empirical validity of such theories varies greatly; thus, sometimes (but already within the framework of linguistic theory) it is sardonically stated that these theories are based on pure ideology without any empirical foundation

(Ludtke, 1985, p.102), while it would be necessary to expel physicalism, biologism and other unjustified “isms” from linguistics (see (Ludtke, 1985, pp.102-103);

✓ an explanation of phenomena (not necessarily linguistic) as a consequence of the fact that a person has a language and/or uses a language; for example, they talk about a linguistic explanation of human psyche phenomena (“linguistic psychology”), about the essence of everything that surrounds us (“linguistic philosophy”), about the properties of proof, evidence and persuasion (“linguistic theory of argumentation”).

Sometimes linguistic theory includes not only systematized information about the history and current state of languages, but also the basis for classifying material and methods of linguistic research. Moreover, American structuralists, up until the advent of generativism, very often equated linguistic theory with the methods of processing linguistic material. The test of the validity of a theory was to establish how successfully a linguistic description was obtained using a specific theory. Something similar was in glossematics: “The goal of linguistic theory is to create a procedural method by which a given text can be understood by applying a consistent and exhaustive description”.

Linguistic theory has an “internal domain” associated with analytical procedures of reasoning, and an “external domain” associated with empirical data from various languages. The main task of linguistic theories, since the time of early generativism, is to develop a “restrictive” explanatory theory that specifically specifies the properties of all human languages (Putnam, 2010, p. 1). An equally important and complex task is to explain how and why a person acquires a language on the basis of a finite set of data on the use of this language. Moreover, the “theory of language acquisition” is far from being directly derivable from the theory of language in all points. Language acquisition is represented by special modules that interact with modules of linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge.

The fact that explanatory power has come to be valued more highly than simple descriptive adequacy is seen by some (Pullum, 1991, pp. 11-12) as a fashion that sooner or later must be replaced (perhaps has already been replaced) by other priorities. However, one can follow fashion, but not necessarily grovel before it: “One can keep a finger on the pulse of fashion without licking its boots” (Pullum, 1991, p. 11).

Conclusion

With all the variety of formulations, it can be said that the question for many centuries has been reduced to the following: how is form related to the purpose, or function of expression? Some groups of researchers prove that form is not predetermined by function, while others try to discover, if not a direct, then at least an indirect motivating relationship between form and function.

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