



American Descriptivism

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AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVISM

1. Basic ideas of American Descriptivism.

2. Edward Sapir's linguistic conception.

3. Leonard Bloomfield's linguistic conception.

4. Antimentalism.

5. Distributionalism.

6. Morphology in American structural Linguistics.



MODERN SUBJECT OF LINGUISTICS



American approach

Its pioneer was Franz Boas.

Arose from preoccupations of American anthropologist, who established descriptions of the American Indian languages before they disappeared. Historical analysis was ruled out.



European approach

Arise out of aims and methods of the 19th century comparative philology with its focus on written records, historical analysis and interpretation.



AMERICAN

APPROACH:

Field methods - techniques for the recording and analysis of languages which the linguist himself could not speak and which had not previously been committed to writing.

- **Concentration on the form.** The lexical meaning was disregarded.
- **Structuralistic view** . Formed by Franz Boas : it is not necessary for all traditional categories to be present in all languages.
- **Antropological and ethnographical view** – the attantion is paid to the life, habbits and “behaviour” of Indian tribes.

Mathematical methods – to formalize the analysis of the language and develop various models of grammatical description.



EDWARD SAPIR

- the founder of Ethnolinguistics

“Eliminate
never learn

The world of our experience
and generalized into a **system**
are units having form (speech
(elements of experience).

Language is a **dynamic system**
our language is practically
fallacious” [Language p. 1



individual will

“Language”

ified
e signs

form – individual variations
bed by major agreements.



EDWARD SAPIR'S LINGUISTIC CONCEPTION

Language units

Formal

Words

Functional

Radical (grammatical) elements and sentences (finished sentence is a living sentence type, which means that many sentences can be formed in relation to the same fundamental *sentence pattern*).



Leonard Bloomfield -



the most outstanding representative of American structuralism.

- *“Introduction of the Study of Language” (1914)*
- *“A set of postulates for the science of language” (1926)*
- *“Language” (1933) – generations of American linguists during the 30s-40s.*



Bloomfield's mechanistic approach

The main goal is to put Linguistics on scientific footing by scientific introduction, a perfect description of a language.

The methods of linguists should resemble those of natural sciences.

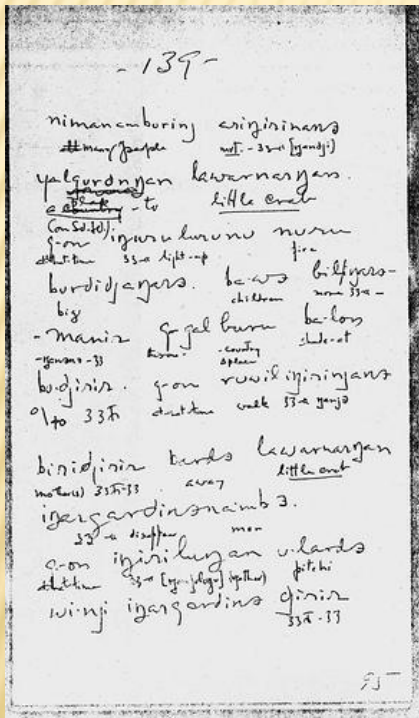
The ideal *use* of language is seen in Mathematics.

The explanations of different kinds are cause-and-effect sequences.



Basic behaviouristic scheme

S - R a stimulus that brings about a reaction



“Jack and Jill are walking down a lane. Jill is hungry, sees an apple, and makes a noise with her larynx, tongue and lips. Jack vaults the fence, climbs the tree, takes the apple, and brings it to Jill, who eats it.”

The scheme of this story is: **S - r...s - R**.
Linguists should deal with the mediating part of the scheme (r....s).



American structuralism

American structuralism is focused on formal analysis, leaving the meaning facet aside. The analysis of meaning is the weak point in language study, which is related to the limited human knowledge.

This part of grammar was to be purely formal study, independent of semantics. On the other hand Bloomfield assumed that each linguistic form has a constant and definite meaning.



BLOOMFIELD'S TWO TOP CATEGORIES

Grammar

The arrangement of morphemes

Lexicon

Total stock of morphemes in a language

Morpheme – is the minimal unit of grammatical structure. Its meaning is termed the sememe.

Morpheme – is the linguistic form that cannot be further divided into smaller parts. Linguistic form can be free (can be spoken alone) and bound (cannot be spoken alone).

A morpheme can have several *allomorphs*. A set of related forms constitute a *paradigm*.



The principle of immediate constituents

**The basic principle is the division of each
complex form into two, lower-level,
constituents.**

Poor John ran away.

IC: poor John & ran away.

Poor John.

IC: poor & John.

Away

IC: a & way



Word as the smallest unit being a free form.



Primary word

Consist of a single morpheme such as man, boy, cut or contain more than one bound form: re-ceive, de-ceive.



Secondary word

Compounds and derivations such as happy-go-lucky, down-to-earth





Antimentalism

Bloomfieldian Linguistics took as a point of departure the behaviourists Psychology.

A speech act is an instance of behavior of a particular type.

They say that human conduct is totally predictable on the basis of the situations in which it occurs.

Mechanism of mentalism thesis: Speech must be explained by the external conditions as well as internal one.

Speech is an explanation that cannot be immediately achieved.



Distributionalism

After 1945

It is based on the distribution of linguistic forms, which is the sum of the environments in which the elements occurs.

The distributionalist program arose indirectly out of the view of meaning as a domain of continuously variable and possibly unknowable details without verifiable internal organization.



The crucial problem of distributional analysis

The problem was to decide whether forms occurring in the same environments were different or equivalent.

The positions taken by the distributionalists:

Joos was actively interested in lexicology and semantic structure;

Bloch regarded meaning as a practical shortcut to the results best obtained through more laborious;

Trager was fully committed to excluding meaning from Linguistics altogether.



The crucial problem of distributional analysis

Bloomfield's view:

- *Forms identical in meaning would be mutually substitutable in all environments, and thus would not differ in distribution;*
- *Forms differing in meaning are not mutually substitutable in all environments, and therefore differ in distribution;*
- *Observation shows that different forms always differ somewhat in distribution, and therefore must differ somewhat in meaning;*
- *A difference in form implies a difference in distribution and in turn a difference in meaning. There are thus no true synonyms.*



Pike's theory of tagmemics



Etic view

(distributionalism)

Consist in refusing all hypotheses concerning the function of the events being reported and in characterizing them only by means of spatio-temporal criteria.



Emic view

Consist in interpreting events according to their particular function in the particular world to which they belong.



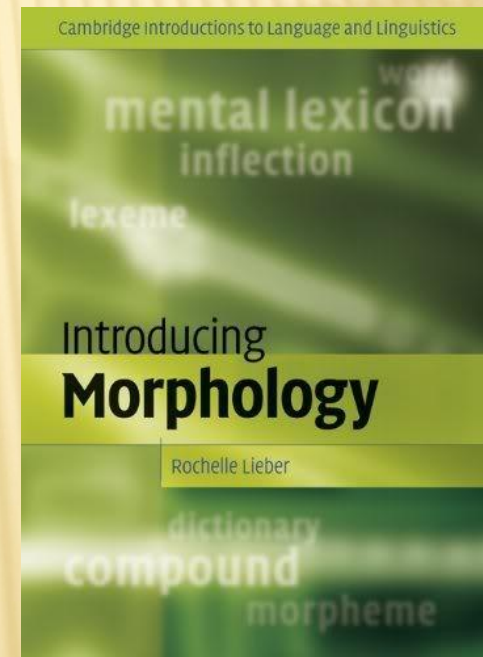
Morphology in American Structural Linguistics

Adherents to American structural school typically viewed linguistics not so much as a “theory” of the language nature, but rather as a body of descriptive and analytical procedures.

Linguistic analysis was expected to proceed by focusing selectively on one dimension of language structure at a time before tackling the next one.

Each dimension was formally referred to as a linguistic level.

The task was the separation of levels – first the pronunciation, then the word structure, then the sentence structure and finally the meaning of utterance.



LITERATURE

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