

## Unit one: Modern linguistics (European structuralism)

### Lesson 01: introduction to Modern Linguistics

Modern linguistics began to develop in the 18th century with work almost entirely centering around Indo-European studies and leading to a highly elaborate and consistent reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European language. The first half of the 20th century was marked by the structuralist school, based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure in Europe and Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield in the United States. The 1960s saw the rise of many new fields in linguistics, such as Noam Chomsky's generative grammar, William Labov's sociolinguistics, Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and also modern psycholinguistics.

#### 1. Historical linguistics

During the 18th century, linguistics was based on linguistics and anthropology. In his *The Sanscrit Language* (1786), Sir William Jones proposed that Sanskrit and Persian had resemblances to Classical Greek, Latin, Gothic, and Celtic languages. From this idea sprung the field of comparative linguistics and historical linguistics. Through the 19th century, European linguistics centered on the comparative history of the Indo-European languages.

#### 2. Structuralism

In Europe there was a development of structural linguistics, initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss professor of Indo-European and general linguistics, whose lectures on general linguistics, published posthumously by his students, set the direction of European linguistic analysis from the 1920s on; his approach has been widely adopted in other fields under the broad term "Structuralism".

#### 3. Descriptive linguistics

During World War II, North American linguists Leonard Bloomfield, William Mandeville Austin and several of his students and colleagues developed teaching materials for a variety of languages whose knowledge was needed for the war effort. This work led to an increasing prominence of the field of linguistics, which became a recognized discipline in most American universities only after the war.

#### 4. Generative linguistics

It is a school of thought within linguistics that makes use of the concept of a generative grammar. The term 'generative' is a concept borrowed from mathematics, indicating a set of definitions rather than a system that creates something. It is most closely associated with the work of Noam Chomsky.

#### 5. Functionalism

Functional theories of language propose that since language is fundamentally a tool, it is reasonable to assume that its structures are best analyzed and understood with reference to the functions they carry out. This means that functional theories of grammar tend to pay attention to the way language is actually used, and not just to the formal relations between linguistic elements. Functional theories then describe language in term of functions existing on all levels of language.

- Phonological function                      Semantic function                      Syntactic functions                      Pragmatic functions

#### 6. Cognitive linguistics

In the 1970s and 1980s, a new school of thought known as cognitive linguistics emerged as a reaction to generativist theory. Led by theorists such as Ronald Langacker and George Lakoff, linguists working within the realm of cognitive linguistics propose that language is an emergent property of basic, general-purpose cognitive processes.