Grammar Debate before the Emergence of Modern Linguistics

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Abstract

The debate at philosophical level, various opposing views, controversies at conceptual level have been debated in a chronological order beginning from Greece to Nineteenth Century. The Greeks are the cardinal part of this debate because their masters' devotion and dedication for the development of the grammar gave birth to philosophical debates.

Before the emergence of linguistics, the study of grammar at the philosophical level could be traced back to Greek notions such as logic and syllogism, Naturalist versus conventionalist, Anomaly versus Analogy. These concepts gave rise to controversies in the Roman Age which effected a change in our old assumption that grammar is a part of rhetoric rather than logic. But Greek's endeavour was not entirely undermined by the new concept of Romans. Analytical study began and enveloped whole Europe because Romans had started to analyze Latin language and its grammar with Greek. These analyses were at philosophical as well conceptual level that continued throughout.

It was only in the 18th – 19th century that the old Greek – Latin tradition was remoulded in the light of the discovery of the Indian tradition and the trends of comparative and historical linguistics of the 19th century.

The emergence of the Neo-grammarians, provided the scientific basis to historical linguistics premised on more and more data collection from actual languages, besides a series of historical events and previous trends in grammar studies that were carried over to the 20th century. What we call modern grammar is the gift of philosophy propounded by such great masters of the 1st half of the 20th century such as De Sassure, Bloomfield, Edward Sapir, and Noam Chomsky.

Keywords: ELT- English Language Teaching, Philosophy, Philosophic, logic, Anomaly, Analogy, Convention, Greece, Greek, Syllogism, Syllogistic, Emergence, Tradional and Modern, Semantics, Entities

Introduction

In this phase grammar was basically studied as a part of logic, rhetoric or philosophy. The developments in the area of grammar studies in this phase show that it has been a favourite discipline for the civilizations in general and the Greeks in particular. So much so that philosophically the following three opposing views emerged among the Greek masters and they still remain cardinal points of discussion among linguists: Logic and Syllogism; Naturalist Vs. Conventionalist and Analogy Vs. Anomaly.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the research paper is to bring new ideas at the level of philosophic grammar the study of grammar, though originated in the ancient Greece, later proliferated through centuries and through various civilizations. Such a spread in time and space, as a consequence, brought in a series of new ideas, philosophies, views, concepts, trends and approaches, premised on which the grammarians and linguists studied the role and significance of grammar in the use of language for various purposes. That means these philosophies, concepts and theories relating grammar were either, developed, continued, refuted or even revived by the next generations/civilizations. The term 'philosophical' will include the major concepts, trends, theories and views regarding grammar.

Logic and Syllogism

The word 'logic' has been derived from Greece. It was used in Greece as a branch of philosophy which is used to distinguish between right and wrong, correctness and incorrectness, on the basis of reasoning.

On the other hand we can say that logic is the study of reasoning. Dinneen (1967:78) states that the word:

> Logos has many meanings such as 'native', 'plan', 'argument', 'Phrase', 'sentence', and 'proposition', depending on the universe of discourse we could assign it. [1]

Later it was believed that 'logos' is composed of the terms '*rhema*' and '*noma*'. That means Logic is the systematic study of statements with validity and proof. In this process, inferences need to be valid and have proof.

For example,

"All students are honest";

"Ravi is a student", therefore,

"Ravi is honest"; is a valid inference, but the argument that

"All students are honest", therefore "Ravi is honest", is an invalid inference, even if "Ravi is a student".

This kind of inferencing is the way to find out the conclusion or result through logic. Further Dinneen (1967:76) claims that logic, is formal and tries to describe the correct combination leading to the true statements.

> Plato attempted to establish a discipline that could deal with such rules, was a first attempt to found a formal logic, that is, a system by which we can tell whether combinations are correct or not, merely by inspecting the relations among the terms used. He did not distinguish sufficiently among the various sources of limitation on linguistic constructions (grammatical, stylistic, truth-functional), but he did devise a technique that leads later to the formation of syllogistic rules.[2]

Aristotle who was a logician wanted to give a standard form by which any one could reduce any logical arguments, for this he presented the modified form of logic, called "syllogism".

Syllogism means a formal logic. This is not only the modified concept of logic but also a philosophical recognition among the linguists, logicians, and the grammarians. This kind of notion did not formalize the thoughts, but the formulation created an ability to answer many questions, which are possible for a new realm of thought. This was the technique to give answers on the basis of logical consequence. This kind of proof based statements/ conclusion gave birth to the term 'syllogism'. A syllogism is modernly defined as:

> A particular kind of argument containing three categorical propositions, where two of them are premises and one a conclusion; logical form allows one to suitable subjects and predicates for letters (variables). Aristotle was the first to create a logical system which

allowed predicates and subjects to be represented by letters. We can see an example of this in Aristotle's famous "Barbara" syllogism:

> If A is predicated of all B,
> And B is predicated of all C,
> Then A is predicated of all C.

By predicated, Aristotle means A belongs to B, or all B's are A's. We can substitute subjects and predicates into this syllogism to get:

> If all humans (B's) are mortal (A),
> And all Greeks (C's) are humans (B's),
> Then all Greeks (C's) are mortal (A).

(http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/greekscience/students/jordana/logic.html) [3]

So we can say that syllogism means a variety of logical argument. The above sentence has three distinctions like –

> All humans are mortal
> All Greeks are humans
> All Greeks are mortal.

'Being mortal' is a major term, 'Greeks' is a minor term and 'being human' is the link between 'All humans' and 'the Greeks'. This is the way to conclude each premise.

The Place of syllogism in logic

The logical concept became popular before the Nineteenth Century. Logic flourished too much by the syllogistic reasoning. The tradition was very difficult because of its complexity. This is why its application could not expand at a large scale. There were very few who practiced it. It needs logic as well as valid reason. There were many logicians who paid much attention to make it simpler and introduced to 'quantifier theory' and 'predicate logic'. These syllogistic views helped to get in findings of logical arguments of Maths, Philosophies and in Sciences too.

The Greeks approached the study of grammar as a major part of logic and philosophy. Language and its grammar with various constituents such as parts of speech, etc. were studied and deciphered mainly for literary purposes. That is why the aspects of language/grammar in Aristotle's *poetics* are based on the analysis of the plays by Sophists. The study of grammar, thus, with Greek was mainly confined to the study and/or creation of literature. That is why Longinus, too, in his essay "*On the Sublime*" writes of the type of language to be used by writers of literary texts. In addition to this they talked of the sublimity of language for literature, hence they were able to differentiate between the language of common mass and the literary language. At the same time the basis of their linguistic analysis were mainly literary written texts available to them.

Naturalists Vs. Conventionalists

This debate is related to the origin and existence of language in general. The Greeks of the 5th century B.C. looked at language in two opposing perspectives of 'Naturalism' and 'Conventionalists'. Naturalists believed that language is governed by nature, while the conventionalists believed that language is governed by the conventions of the time and place, it is being used.

The naturalists argued that the forms of the words reflected directly on the nature of objects while the conventionalists thought that language is conventional and there is no logical connection between form and meaning of words. (http://www.qflpc.com.cn/jxjxzx/show.uspx?id=24&cid=13) [4]

The Greek philosophers were highly interested in such a discussion. While some believed that language is acquired conventionally, others assumed that language is inherited naturally. This kind of debate existed for a long time. The Greeks discussed it at length and tried to resolve the controversy between Conventionalists and Naturalists, which as a consequence resulted in such grammatical categorizations as 'Parts of Speech', and "Subject-Predicate' besides the semantic studies.

Plato was a 'Naturalists' who believed that by 'Nature' we can give the correct name for everything. He agreed that there are words that have the quality of onomatopoeia, but, on the other hand, the majority of the words have the 'Natural' connection on the basis of 'Semantics' with the reference to one or more of their constituent sounds. He explained that sounds exist in every words which are 'naturally' appropriate to their meaning.

Plato concluded that men did not simply agree to call an "apple" an "apple", but that there was a logical connection between the object and its nature?

(http://www.personal.ecu.edu/southardo/history.rtf) [5]

On the other hand conventionalists disapproved the concept in which language was based on 'Nature'. They declared that the nature of the things is pure due to convention, but there is no sign of deep appropriateness. Here we can see the logical connection between the object and its name.

Aristotle was a conventionalist who was not satisfied with platonic views on language.

Aristotle disagreed with Plato's position, contending that language was arrived at by convention or agreement. Accordingly, he was not interested in the etymology of words, but in describing the words as they were used. Aristotle was the first to contend that words could be classified into "parts of speech", he distinguished three parts of speech, like noun, verb, and the third class that he labeled, "conjunctions.

(http://www.personal.ecu.edu/southardo/history.rtf) [6]

The controversy remains the same till date. The early debate between the 'naturalists' and 'conventionalists' with exclusive reference to the Greek language merged later in a more far-reaching controversy between Anomaly and Analogy.

Analogy and Anomaly

Analogy and Anomaly was another dichotomy which divided the Greek grammarians at

conceptual level. This controversy also refers to regularity and irregularity of language. That means this debate is related to the purity of language, which was generally attempted to be maintained by the classics by avoiding any anomaly or irregularity in their languages.

Plato, Aristotle and the Alexandrians were Analogists, while the Stoics were the Anomalists. This division was mainly sharpened due to the rivalry of Alexandria and Pergamon under Macedonian rule as two seats of leaning where the Alexandrians were dominated by the analogists and Pergamon by the Stoics, the Anomalist. This debate should be considered more as the two attitudes to language. Dionysins Thrax (1st Century BC) was an important scholar of Alexandria who uncovered Analogy. He too thought that language should be regular and hence be saved from any irregularities in it. The Alexandrians, investigated at length into the notion of analogy, but failed to get complete success. Dinneen (1967:95) feels concerned about Alexandrians failure and tries to explain by saying that they followed the unfortunate example of:

Aristotle in concentrating on the final, single letter of forms, they were unable to show the complete regularities of the declinations and conjugations, so that their lists were always subject to the attack of the pergamon anomalists. [7]

To minimize the confusion and to maintain the regularity in language more effectively, Thrax presented the concerning list in which he explained what grammarians ought to do, and later on grammarians diverted their attention to distinguish between composition and distribution of linguistic items.

On the other hand there were the Anomalists who opposed the analogists and believed in deviation from the normal order, form or rule that is the language which is irregular and unusual. Jindal and Syall (1998:39) pointed out that the:

Anomalists who believed that properties of things were not related to the words used to name them and that there was a great deal of irregular change taking place in words (this view point was held by the stoics, a school of philosophers in Greece). [8]

(Crystal 1997:408) suggests:

Stoics, (a well known school of thoughts in Greece) were the followers of Anomaly and have been called as Anomalist. Apart from these controversies, different attention were paid especially on these fields such as etymology, pronunciation and grammar. It is because of the many exceptions of rules of language which has been displayed. But their attention was towards irregular verbs of misconception of gender and sex. [9]

Remarking An Analisation

Such a controversy between 'anomaly' and 'analogy' continued till Xenodotus philadelphus, rather it is echoed even today. It is actually the tolerance of the irregularities in language, that various varieties of the English language in the late 20th century were internationally recognized. Dinneen (1967:95) briefs the controversy of Anomaly and Analogy in following words:

> The Anamoly – Analogy controversy lasted for several centuries in the grammatical field, beginning with the work of Xenodotus philadelphus (284-257 BC) and culminating in the work of Apollonius Dyscolus and his son Herodian (H.A.D. 180). The authoritative codification of the work of the Alexandrians is the grammar of Dionysins Thrax (100 BC). This was translated into Latin as the *Ars grammatica* by Remmius Palaemon in the first century A.D. and has served as model, both in the sequence of topics and terminology, for grammars, sight up to our own day. [10]

Apart from this controversy the Greek grammarians drew their attention towards etymology, grammar and phonetics. Thrax was a well known figure among the Greek scholars who added many points to solve such types of confusion and brought new concepts in these areas.

The controversy contributed to the study of language by paying attention towards 'Analogies' and 'Anomalies', 'regularities' and 'irregularities of the language. Both theories contributed to the systematization of grammar. These notions reached even Rome and other European countries. In the words of Robins (1967: 374) the 'Analogy' and 'Anomaly' debate can be briefed as follows:

> The analogists emphasized the regularities of grammatical structures and word forms, and the parallels between grammatical forms, word meanings, as constituting the essence of language and the direction in which standards of correctness should be sought, and tended to take up a 'conventional' attitude towards language itself. The anomalists stressed the numerous irregular forms in grammatical paradigms and 'anomalous' associations of plural number with singular entities, genders divorced from any sex reference, and the like, and leaned more towards the naturalists 'view of language, accepting its anomalies as they stood.[11] (Robins, 1967: 374)

This controversy gave way to detailed study in the area of language which resulted in the formulation of Greek grammar for the first time.

The above discussed dichotomies did not remain confined to the Greeks rather they spread for and wide and their echoes can be heard even today in the modern era. However, the later generations continued working exhaustively in the area of grammar studies. It look significant here to mention that the Greeks considered grammar more as a part of logic and philosophy. They were inferring the rules of grammar from the actual bulletin modes of language. That is they considered grammar as a tool for effective writing/rhetoric.

The Romans followed the same tradition and considered grammar as a part of rhetoric. That means they, unlike the Greeks, paid less attention to the aspects of logic and philosophy in comparison to rhetoric. They made extensive studies in the Latin language and attempted to minimize the debates and established the rules of grammar with more clarity. In a way they furthered the rules of grammar established by the Greeks. So some of their contributions, can be listed below:

1. Comparative analysis of Greek and Latin.
2. Cicero (106-43 B.C) focused on the 'style' of language.
3. Quintillian (lst AD) was concerned with 'usage' and 'public speaking'. They showed that the spoken mode of language made its significance with the Romans, while it was almost lacking among the Greeks.
4. Donatuus wrote a Latin grammar which was used until the middle ages.
5. Priscian (6th AD) attempted to determine grammatical categories

The Romans, though adopted a major chunk of grammatical rules from the Greeks, but these were modified by bringing in clarity and practicality. It is significant to note here that the grammatical rules that were established by the Greeks out of scholarly endeavors were used by the Romans for academic purposes as a part of school curriculum. Since Latin was the language of the Church for the whole Europe, especially until the medieval ages, it was taught as a major language in schools. That means the rules of Latin grammar mainly dominated the whole of Europe as a model for the language learning and teaching. It is only with the emergence of the Renaissance which brought a change in almost all walks of life that some new ideas pertaining to language came out. Besides, the vernacular languages of Europe with English in England had taken a proper shape with its own powerful literature, and Britain was emerging as an imperialist power premised on the Renaissance changes. Language in the 17th and the 18th centuries started to be looked in a new perspective. Hurtung (1962:23) rightly consolidates the existing grammar studies:

> Where as the Port-Royal grammarians were interested primarily in demonstrating the general philosophical function of linguistic term, practical grammarians were concerned mainly with devising prescriptive rules that wanted to provide a guide to usage. For this reason they preferred simple categorical statements supported by examples of correct and incorrect

usage to abstract reasoning based on logic. Bishop Lowth might praise a philosophical grammar such as the Hermes of James Harris, which was in the tradition of Aristotle, the medieval scholastics and the Port-Royal Grammarians, but for the partial reasons he wrote his own grammar according to the pattern of the most commonly used elementary Latin grammarians of this time.[12]

The above changes in attitude to grammar led the grammarians to the following major publications in the eighteenth century such as Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary*, James Harris's *A Philosophical Enquiry Concerning Universal Grammar* (1751), Joseph Priestley *The rudiments of English Grammar* (1761), Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to the English Grammar* (1762), and Mindley Murrey's *English Grammar* (1795).

The Nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the new ideas which later developed as the discipline of linguistics that redefined and re-categorised the rules of grammar and consequently replaced the traditional grammar by Modern grammar.

In the present section, therefore, we saw that while the Greeks studied language in its philosophical perspectives for purely scholarly purposes, the grammarians of Rome and later era studied language/grammar for the practical purpose of learning and teaching. This phase of grammar studies underwent a shift in approach from logic/philosophy to rhetoric to pedagogy.

If we take up the example of the English language since the sixteenth century England, we find a continuous and consistent effort on the part of the grammarians to develop the grammar of English mainly for its practical purposes. English has already been started to be used as an official language of the Royal bureaucracy by mid 16th century it had become a core language of English literature; debate on the issue of the supremacy of English as a vernacular language over Latin and French and Greek was going on. The English language was struggling hard to attain the prestige. The spelling and accent were being standardized by Richard Mulcaster, Edmund Coode, John Half, Sir Thomas Smith and William Bulloker were the reformers who worked in this area. Bulloker is also known for publishing *A Brief Grammar For English* in 1586 which is claimed to be the first English book on grammar. Later some more grammar books, based on Latin grammatical framework, were published. One such example is Ben Jonson's *Short and Scatchy,* which is intended to be used by foreigners.

John Wallis, a mathematician and the member of the Royal Society, published a book on English grammar written in Latin for the foreigners. This book of grammar is popularly known for deviating from Latin tradition and also for establishing a distinction between 'shall' and 'will'.

C.C. Fries tells us that 17th-century grammars in general were designed either for foreigners or for school

use, in order to lead to the study of Latin. In the 18th Century, however, grammars were written predominantly for English speakers, and although they were written for the purpose of instructing, they seem to find more fun in correcting A change in the underlying philosophy of grammar had occurred, and it is made explicit in perhaps the first 18th-century grammar, *A Key to the Art of Letters…*, published in 1700 by a schoolmaster named A. Lane. He thought it a mistake to view grammar simply as a means to learn a foreign language and asserted that "the true End and Use of *Grammar* is to teach how to speak and write well and learnedly in language already known, according to the unalterable Rules of right reason.

(http://ling.kgw.tuberlin.de/lexicography/data/B_HIST_EU.html) [13]

Later Addison, Steel and Swift worked in favour of English grammar for instructional purpose. Based on the concept of 'universal grammar' Bishop Robert Lowth wrote a grammar book entitled *A Short Introduction to the Grammar* (1762).

Lowth's approach was strictly prescriptive: He meant to improve and correct, not describe. He judged correctness by his own rules-mostly derived from Latin grammar.

(http://ling.kgw.tuberlin.de/lexicography/data/B_HIST_EU. html) [14]

Like the 16th and the 17th centuries even in the 18th and the 19th centuries both in England and America were seen a series of books on grammar and rhetoric, meant purely for learning/teaching purposes. These books of grammar were mainly guided by the Latin tradition. In today's diction these books are branded as 'traditional' and 'prescriptive'.

Conclusion

In the above discussion- It was observed that the grammarians, rhetoricians and the philosophers in the initial phase of grammar studies in the ancient Greece argued, discussed and debated on the issues pertaining to origin of language and its scope. The Greeks looked at language as a part of logic and philosophy and mainly propagated to maintain the sanctity and purity of the language. This was tools of all the classical languages. The aspect of irregularity in language came only later. They also debated for long on language being a part of nature or as an entity governed by conventions. The Greeks are known for deciphering the grammatical rules of their language on the basis of the rhetorician text of their time.

The philosophies, concepts, propositions and the grammar rules of their language were continued to be discussed and debated by the Romans. The grammar studies were formalized by the Romans for their practical purposes specially teaching of the Latin language. With due course of the time grammar was considered to the part of rhetoric and was on timed

Remarking An Analisation

until the end of the medieval age of Europe when renaissance arrived and various vernacular language of Europe started emerging as at local levels. But Latin dominated the European countries for centuries as the language of the Church. By 17th and 18th century Britain emerged as imperial with the expansion of the English language power with its great literary tradition, over its glories for various Administrative and business purposes. Looking these historical perspectives one can easily realized that the development of grammar studies of the vernacular languages of Europe, including English, was developed under the influence of the Latin models. The concepts of IC. Analysis, Phrase Structure and Transformational-Generative Grammar are some major contributions.

Then, there came the group of linguistics and grammarian who did not look at language merely as a set of rules rather than they came to believe that languages has to perform certain roles, function in the society. Hence the concept of linguistic competence as propounded by Chomsky was extended by Dell Hymes in the name of communicative competence which was supported and strengthen by the list of language functions provided by Halliday and such other theories as Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics.

This paper therefore, traces the arguments and counter arguments at philosophical level that consolidated and helped in developing the deep line of grammar/language studies, which was basically premised on the studies developed by the Greek masters. The Nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of new revolutionary ideas and philosophies that brought in a change in the very perspective of grammar studies. Languages and then grammatical rules started to be freshly defined and categorized. Though by the Nineteenth century many, books pertaining to grammar had been developed, Ferdinand de sassure came up with his new concepts about language and its structure. His concepts of 'langue' and 'parole', 'synchornic' and 'diachronic' and 'syntagmatic' and 'paradigmatic' introduced a new outlook to grammar studies and attracted many followers. The idea of 'structuralism' propounded by de Sassure was later extended by Bloomfield and Chomsky. Though they followed the structural school, they also came up with their original and philosophical points of views about language and grammar.

End Notes

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