

Historical Overview on Grammar: A Journey of Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century

Abstract

From the 13th to the 15th centuries, grammarians and philosophers only explained certain rules of grammar. Universal grammar came into being as a great achievement of the mid 13th to 14th century. It provided learners as well as scholars with an understanding of grammar. In 17th century, Port-Royal group worked hard and modified logic based thoughts of the Greeks and translated it into Latin. Along with these French and English grammars were also written. So from these points of view this age is very important and impressive. English grammar was not in an original form but borrowed from Latin. Traditions had changed the trends towards analyses and observation of language as well as grammatical modification. Grammarians of this age were keenly interested in presenting general grammar for all but they could not ignore universal grammar's concept. These developments were held by the support of Port-Royal group. They did not studied literary language but paid much attention to dictation of usage by actual speech. They showed their interest in parts of speech and logical categories. These kinds of achievements were made valuable in this century.

Grammarians of this century were very conscious about grammatical analysis. As they moved into the 18th century, they paid attention to phonetics, historical linguistics and semantic etymology.

Keywords: Grammar, Greek, Latin, Syntax, Historical, Phonetics, Linguistics, Port-Royal Group, Etymology, Phonetics, Semantics, Prescriptive And Descriptive Approach, Normative, Neo-Grammarians.

Introduction

This paper highlights the origin and development of grammar from seventeenth to Nineteenth century. Syall and Jindal (1998:41) describes that:

Seventeenth century, interest aroused in modern European languages, with an emphasis on French as a language of elegance and beauty, leading to the establishment of the Port-Royal school of grammars. This school expounded a general theory of grammar based on logic through the medium of languages such as Latin and French. During this time too, English grammars were written.¹

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Nasim Akhtar

Assistant Professor,

Deptt. of English,

G.F. College,

Shahjahanpur, U.P., India

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Grammarians of this century were very conscious about grammatical analysis. As they moved into the 18th century, they paid attention to phonetics, historical linguistics and semantic etymology. The eighteenth century was a period of great interest in English language and its grammar. The British were also interested in seeing the regularity and stability in the language which was not in the classical languages. They first wanted to establish an academy by which language could be regulated smoothly. The dictionary was also written in this age by Dr. Samuel

Johnson. Johnson wrote a brief treatise on grammar but there was the problem of continuity. In 1762 Joseph Priestley published *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* which made a remarkable position in the history of English grammar. In the 18th century, most of the scholars wanted to form a standard language and for this they used grammar as a tool.

Grammar was used as measurement. There was lots of confusion whether French was true or German. There is no touch stone method to check right or wrong. No one can give any judgment regarding linguistics. Prescriptivists of 18th century suggest that languages are arbitrary and conventional.

Malmkjaer and Kristen (eds.) (1993:191) deliberate on the achievements of 18th century:

The crowning achievement in the latter part of the eighteenth century came with the discovery that the Sanskrit language of Ancient India was related to the languages of Europe and to Latin and Greek.²

This was the age of comparative linguistics, in which comparison was on the peak. This kind of a trend brought lots of changes in the study of language and its grammar.

The Nineteenth century is the best known as the era of historical and comparative linguistics. In the early part of 19th century best known figures were Dante, Rasmus Rask, the German Franz Bopp, and Jacob Grimm. The comparative study of work done in a systematic way was started by the philologists, Rask (1787-1832) and Grimm (1785-1863). Rask started the first systematic grammar of the Old Norse and Old English. Grimm's studies were basically on Germanic linguistics. He introduced a law for sound shift that is known as Grimm's Law. These laws were discussed in *Deutsche Grammatike* (1822) second edition. This was the age when aspects of comparative and historical linguistics and its theoretical and technical methodology have been covered. There were some names like Rask, Grimm and Bopp, who were the founders of scientific historical linguistic. In this age there were some scholars who worked for Sanskrit like A.W.F. Schlegel (1767-1845), F. Bopp (1791-1867), and A.F. Pott (1802-87). Schlegel's (1808) *On The Language And*

The Learning Of The Indians (1808) presented the intrinsic structure of language. Most of the linguists who developed, their valuable time to develop a relationship between one language to another. On the other hand, in this age historical grammarians did not follow earlier prescriptive approaches but were interested in discovering a language etymology. Lindley Murray's *English Grammar* (1837, 7th Ed. U.S) was concerned with the expansion of the 21 rules of syntax. We can conclude that both the 18th and the 19th centuries were the followers of not descriptive approach to grammar but of prescriptive. These scholars convinced that the languages should be standardized. On the other hand grammarians needed to look for correct usage and establish it as a law-giver.

Ramjiwale (1999:178) described the real conditions of the 19th century in the following manner:

Developments taking place in the nineteenth century were characterized by a radical shift from the rigid classical normative approach to a more structured one which brought into forms the need to adopt a descriptive and analytical approach. Deepening interest in the study of civilizations and culture necessitated a closer look at the ancient languages with the same investigative outlook that was applied to excavating the remains of historical, archaeological past. Diachronic study of languages with a view to comparing them in terms of structural and other linguistic correspondences and discovering common sources of descent called for strict scientific methodology, and a complete abandonment of the earlier speculative approach.³

These developments presented a new chapter for the language studies. At the end of 19th century historical and comparative linguistics was in full bloom. Later on the scientific study of language began and flourished very much. Ramjiwale (1999:178) urges that:

Such revolutionary developments were bound to have momentous effect on the general view of 'grammar'! The change can be seen in this description of grammar advanced by Grattan and Gurrey as early as 1928. The grammar of a language is not a list of rules imposed upon its speakers by scholarly authorities but is a scientific record of the actual phenomena of that language, written and spoken. If any community habitually uses certain forms of speech, these forms are part of grammar of the speech of that community! So value judgments and yardsticks of 'correctness' and 'nobleness' were discarded and grammar was seen as 'concerned'

with the structure of stretches of utterance, or stretches of writing, and with the grouping and classification of the recurrent elements of utterances by virtue of the functional places they occupy and the relations they contract with one another in the structures.⁴

During the 19th century the attention of most linguists was focused mainly on standard written languages. Only a few felt about the spoken languages. Generally a very small minority of linguists is concerned themselves with the variations in form exhibited within vernacular languages. These were very problematic issues to tackle in the situation within the framework of historical linguistics. This was developed by the neo-grammarians.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the research paper is to bring new ideas and achievements of grammar at historical level. Grammar still was as a part of logic and philosophy. They were highly influenced by syntax. Discussions were started on different issues of grammar. There were some prescriptive approaches to grammar. Latin on these rules guided them towards usage.

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The Neo-Grammarians

One of the important trends in linguistics at the end of the 19th century was the emergence of the neo-grammarians or *Junggrammatiker*. This was the new school for linguists, who helped to give a scientific base to historical linguistics. The tradition of this school was not to believe in theoretical aspects and it favored collecting the data from actual languages.

This type of research came from the American linguists Bloomfield and Sapir, the neo-grammarians, who paid more attention to the field of linguistics. There were two important fields of linguistics Phonetics and Dialectology. These subjects were not only part of discussion, but also raised many issues, which become controversial. Differences of pronunciation, grammar and vocabularies were mapped by neo grammarians in Europe. They also studied differences between two dialects and languages. They found that it varies culturally and phonetically. They found different boundaries between dialects and languages.

Whitney and the Neo-Grammarians such as Brugmann Paul, Osthoff, Sievers, Leskien and others studied both comparatively and historically. In England there were some scholars who trained to 'the Neo-Grammarians like – J. Wright, and in France A. Meillet. In America, the linguists, F. Boas, E. Sapir, and L. Bloomfield, de Saussure's approach of synchronic vs. diachronic has been taken from historical linguistics. Later on they linked each other in a natural order. But after the emergence of the father

of modern linguistics, de Saussure, comparative and historical linguistics began to decline.

Descriptive phonetics which was based on data and the formation of different dialects was studied at the end of 19th century. Saussure's effect was continued at the beginning of the 20th century. De Saussure's important structural approach was developed and modified by the American structuralists like Bloomfield and his followers such as Trubetzkoy but Chomsky was the great among them who develop the 'langue' and 'parole' as 'competence' and 'performance'. The school of thoughts – Prague, Hjelmsler and the Copenhagen School Martinet, and Chomsky.

Conclusion

This research paper, thus, takes a bird's eye view of the origin and development of grammar through the ages. The present paper basically lists the major contributions and developments with regard to grammar studies. In a nut-shell it reflects three phases of grammar studies: First the study of grammar as a part of logic and philosophy which was initiated by the Greek masters; secondly the comparative and historical approach to grammar, (the 17th and 18th century); finally the phase of descriptive linguistics which later developed into structural, functional and communicative grammars with the development of Modern Linguistics. It is important to mention here that this paper concentrates more on listing the major grammarians and linguists and their contributions.

Endnotes

- 1 Jindal, D.V. and Syall Pushpinder (1998) *An Introduction to Linguistics: Language Grammar and Semantics*, Prentice-Hall of India, Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, India.
- 2 Malmkjaer, Kirsten (Ed.), (1991) *The Linguistics Encyclopaedia*, Routledge, London.
- 3 Ramjiwale, S. (1999) *Elements of General Linguistics, Vol.1, 2nd edition*, Rama Brothers, Karol Bagh, New Delhi.
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