Lecture 2
Non-Western Linguistic Traditions

Linguistics tries to describe and explain Language. People have thought, and wondered about language throughout recorded history (and most certainly beyond). As part of human thought, Linguistics was part of philosophy (the 'Mother of all sciences') for hundreds, even thousands of years (before it branched off and became a science in its own right). In many cultures, linguistic analysis was part of religious studies and writings (particularly in discussions of the religiously preferred spoken and written forms of sacred texts in Hebrew, Sanskrit and Arabic). However, it appears to our - granted, limited - knowledge that linguistic speculation and investigation have gone on in only a small number of societies:

"To the extent that *Mesopotamian*, *Chinese*, and *Arabic* learning dealt with grammar, their treatments were so enmeshed in the particularities of those languages and so little known to the European world until recently that they have had virtually no impact on Western linguistic tradition. Chinese linguistic and philological scholarship stretches back for more than two millennia, but the interest of those scholars was concentrated largely on phonetics, writing, and lexicography; their consideration of grammatical problems was bound up closely with the study of logic" (1).

Modern linguistics is based on European intellectual tradition originating in Ancient Greece. Both India and China had produced native schools of linguistic thought – in fact, some of the achievements of Indian linguists precede equivalent Western developments by more than a thousand years, but European thinkers were not aware of their ideas (there was little international travel in those days!)

Ancient India
People thought, and analyzed language in ancient India for many centuries. They noticed that there were different kinds of language (the language of the Vedas, Sanskrit for *Divine Knowledge*, vernaculars, etc.) but focus then was not on historical change, but on the description and analysis of **Sanskrit** (Sk. for *perfect*, *complete*).

"Indian linguistics was not itself historical in orientation, though its roots lay in the changes languages undergo in the course of time. But the topics covered by modern descriptive linguistics: semantics, grammar, phonology, and phonetics, were all treated at length in the Indian tradition; and in phonetics and in certain aspects of grammar, Indian theory and practice was definitely in advance of anything achieved in Europe or elsewhere before contact had been made with Indian work. The stimulation afforded by Sanskritic linguistic scholarship carried by Buddhist monks into China has already been noticed. European scholars realized immediately that they had encountered in India a mass of linguistic literature of the greatest importance and stemming from an independent source, even though their interpretation and full appreciation of it was in part halting and delayed" (Robins 1997:170).

Panini (5th century BC) was a great Indian grammarian. His *Eight Books*, translated only in **1891** (!), is one of the earliest works of *descriptive linguistics* and is also the first individually authored treatise on **Sanskrit**. According to some sources, he was born about 520 BC in Pakistan Died: about 460 BC in India. Despite the discrepancy in dates, **Pānini's grammar of Sanskrit** was definitely written between **600 B.C.** and **300 B.C.**

The grammar of Panini is a particularly detailed and effective _description_ of Sanskrit morphology. There were many Indian grammarians before Panini, who had preceded by millennia certain developments in the West: the phoneme, generation of word forms by the successive application of morphological rules, etc. (to the embarrassment of modern linguistics, the concept of **phoneme** seems to have been discovered and forgotten several times through history! ☺)

Panini's Grammar is a monumental work, comprising about four thousand short aphorisms, best known for its technical excellence.
Vyaakaraɳa is a term for grammar in Sanskrit. It means a set of rules by which the language is analyzed. The Sanskrit grammatical tradition has always been praising Panini for his exactness in compiling the rules in a particular order, his minute observations and precision in his descriptive technique. Eminent linguist L. Bloomfield described Panini in his book Language as "the greatest monument of human intelligence".

NATURE OF PANINI'S GRAMMAR - THE SUTRA STYLE
Panini's grammar is written in a **sutra** style. The term _sutra_ means string or thread. It represents a particular type of style in Sanskrit literature. This sutra style is considered to be holy; it consists of a few letters, is characterized by clarity /lack of ambiguity. Panini's sutras are regarded as the most ideal illustration of the sutra style.

ECONOMY OF EXPRESSION
Panini has made use of a number of devices to achieve economy of expression. It is because of these devices that Panini could compose the grammar of the Sanskrit Language, both Vedic and non-Vedic, only in **4000 rules**.

IT IS A _DERIVATIONAL_ GRAMMAR
Panini's work is devoted to the description of Sanskrit language. At the outset, it must be pointed out that, Panini's avowed goal was to provide an adequate descriptive grammar for Sanskrit and not to make a semantic analysis of the language. As a result, Panini focused only on deriving grammatically correct phrases and sentences, and not on the derivational process involving a number of syntactical, morphological and phonological operations. Thus, Panini's grammar is primarily a derivational grammar.
Panini reduced almost all the grammatical notions to the level of morphemes. For instance, from the Paninian point of view, concepts such as person, tense and case are nothing but a set of suffixes expressing these ideas.

PANINIAN APPROACH TO LINGUISTIC PHILOSOPHY - A STOREHOUSE OF LINGUISTIC THEORIES
It is known that Panini's grammar is not philosophical in nature. However, this does not mean that it totally lacks any philosophical significance. Panini's grammar is storehouse of linguistics theories. Therefore, all the linguistic philosophers and grammarians like Patanjali, Katyayna, **Bhartrhari**, and others drew upon Paninian sutras and quoted them as proof for various kinds of linguistics theories and philosophical concepts.

LANGUAGE IS A TOTAL AND INTEGRATED SYSTEM
Panini views language as a total and integrated system. He gives due importance to its parts as words existing in the total structure of language and not in isolation or wholly independent. The

sentence is the kernel item of derivational process in Panini. This process starts with sentence and ends in sentence construction.

Panini provided a syntactical, morphological, and phonological description of Sanskrit. He has also given due consideration to accentuation, which is a very important characteristic of any spoken language. However, semantics was not part of his interest.

SEMANTICS AND PANINI

Patanjali, another Indian grammarian, believed that grammar is a "*science of words*." Meaning is not a subject matter of grammar; it is learnt from the worldly usages. Patanjali remarks that usage among people gives the sense; the science of grammar only determines the use of correct words with a view to achieve merit.

Study of meaning was not part of the early Indian grammatical tradition. Therefore, Panini was not led away by semantic considerations, but he used them in his grammar so far as they do not go against formal considerations. Thus, for instance, Panini provides rules to derive the verbal and nominal forms through affixation, conditioned in part by the semantics categories. The fact of the matter is that Panini clearly understood the importance of semantic features in grammatical analysis, involving only formal features.

PANINI'S USE OF SEMANTIC ASPECTS

Panini made use of semantic aspects in his grammar in three main ways:

1. He used semantic concepts, i.e. vartamaana (present time), bahutva (plurality) as a starting point in his grammar to derive the corresponding phonological forms by a series of replacement rules.
2. As far as it was possible, he used semantic concepts for grouping words and stems to form class system (for example, *varna* or 'color words').
3. Shades of meaning were conveyed by derivation (word roots adding on suffixes or other words to form compounds).

Thus, it can be said that Panini's use of semantic aspects of the word was limited to derivation of correct forms, and therefore can be considered as secondary.

Most of these notes on Panini's grammar are based on material found at:
http://www.languageinindia.com/feb2005/anirbanpanini1.html

Bhartrhari:

Bhartrhari is another important name we should remember when we talk about the development of linguistic thought in India. He lived many centuries after Panini, around the 5th to 7th Century A.D., and is known for the work called *Vākyapadīya*, which states that the sentence should be interpreted as a single unit - which "conveys its meaning 'in a flash', just as a picture is first perceived as a unity, notwithstanding subsequent analysis into its component coloured shapes" (Robins 1997:173). In other words, the sentence is not understood as a sequence of words put together, but the full meaning of each word is only understood in the context of the other words around it.

This is a brilliant observation, which was not clearly stated in Europe until just about a hundred years ago (Ferdinand de Saussure's insights on the Value of the Linguistic Sign)!

Linguistic Thought in Mesopotamia: the Basra School

Mesopotamia (the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, now part of Iraq) also produced eminent Arab scholars, commonly referred to as the so-called *Basra School*:

Asma'il (740-828): he was a scholar and anthologist, one of the three leading members of the Basra school of Arabic philology. A gifted student of Abu Amr ibn al-Alaa, the founder of the Basra school, Asma'il possessed an outstanding knowledge of the classical Arabic language. On the basis of the principles that he laid down, his disciples later prepared most of the existing collections of the pre-Islamic Arab poets. He also wrote an anthology of mostly religious poetry.

Sibawaihi (760-793?) was a celebrated grammarian of the Arabic language.
After studying in Basra, Iraq, with a prominent grammarian **Khalil**, Sībawayh received recognition as a grammarian himself. Sībawayh is said to have left Iraq and retired to Shīrāz after losing a debate with a rival on Bedouin Arabic usage. His monumental work is al-Kitāb ("The Book") was frequently used by later scholars.

Khalil (718 – betw. 776 & 791): an Arab philologist who compiled the first Arabic dictionary and is credited with the formulation of the rules of Arabic prosody. His dictionary is arranged according to a novel alphabetical order based on pronunciation, beginning with the letter *ayn.*

Al-Farabi (870 – 950 AD) was a brilliant philosopher who wrote more than 100 works; unfortunately, only a small number of them have been preserved. Most of his works are treatises in logic and the philosophy of language (he was particularly interested in the relationship between speech and thought), as well the philosophy of politics, religion, metaphysics, psychology, and natural philosophy.

A re-cap:

➢ **Chinese linguistic thought**
  o goes back more than two thousand years
  o Its main focus was largely on phonetics, writing, and lexicography
  o Grammar was studied as part of *logic* (study of reasoning)

➢ **Indian linguistic theory viewed**
  o Language as a whole integrated system
  o The sentence as the *kernel* of the derivational process, which starts with the sentence and ends in sentence construction
  o Grammar as the 'science of words' – and Meaning as the *function* of proper use of words → focus on morphology.

Set out three requirements for a string of words to be considered a sentence:

  o the words are members of suitable grammatical categories with appropriate morphology (inflection),

  o the words must be 'semantically appropriate' to one another,

      o and the words must be uttered smoothly together (as a concatenation).

➢ **Focused on**
      o morphology [Morphemes: free (lexical & functional) and bound (inflectional & derivational)]

      o Phonology (phonemes of Sanskrit).

➢ **Linguistic Thought in Mesopotamia (the Basra School)**

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- **Al-Farabi** (870 – 950 AD) was a brilliant philosopher who was particularly interested in the relationship between speech and thought.

References

(1) Encyclopedia Britannica 2004 Deluxe Edition CD
(2) R.H. Robins: *A Short History of Linguistics,* 4th Edition, 1997, Longman: New York
(3) Pieter A.M. Seuren: *Western Linguistics: An Historical Introduction* 1998, Blackwell Publishers: Malden, Mass.
(4) Theodora Bynon and F.R. Palmer's *Studies in the History of Western Linguistics* 1986, Cambridge Press: New York).
(5) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_linguistics

Appendix (info on Sanskrit)

Retrieved on 7 March 2006 from: from http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/S_0079.HTM

Sanskrit is the oldest and richest language of India. The study of this language has continued for about five thousand years. The oldest form of this language is found in the *Rgveda*. The composition of the *Rgveda* is supposed to have taken place in 2500 BC. This language was called a Vedic language from the time of the *Rgveda* to the UPANISAD. In ancient times the language, used only in the public domain, was called ***bhasa***. When it passed through a process of reform or purification, it was called *Sangskrta* (*Sam -kr + ta*).

There are two stages of Sanskrit from the chronological point of view, eg Vedic and later Vedic (or Laukika). The later Vedic language is also called Classical Sanskrit. The main difference between these two languages is in their instinctive accents. In Vedic vowel sound there are three kinds of pronunciation, eg *udatta* (high), *anudatta* (low) and *svarita* (mixed), but in Sanskrit this distinction is not maintained.

… Sanskrit is a language in the Indo-European family of languages. It belongs to a sub-branch of Indo-Iranian. … It has some startling similarities with Greek and Latin. For this reason, it seems that these languages originated in the same place and they are thus known as basic Aryan or basic Indo-European languages.

The Sanskrit language has no particular alphabet. Wherever the language studied, the alphabet of that area is adopted for it. But the Nagari or Devanagari alphabet is widely used and internationally accepted for Sanskrit.

… Sanskrit is an inflectional language. In this language the role of case-ending, and of suffix and prefix is very significant. A word used in a sentence with an inflection is called *pada*. A word without inflection cannot be used in a sentence. For this reason, the change of the position of a *pada* in a sentence does not alter the meaning, and for this reason there is no rigid rule for the positioning of a word in sentence constructions.

There are three genders in Sanskrit (masculine, feminine and neuter) and are three numbers (singular, dual and plural). In the verb form there is no change of gender but it has three numbers and three persons (third, second and first). To indicate the tense and mood (including past, present and future tense), there are ten classes of verbal forms. In brief these are known as ten *la-karas*. The roots are divided into three groups- *parasmaipada*, *atmanepada* and *ubhayapada*. Sanskrit is an ornate language and numerous metres are seen in Sanskrit verse. Since it was regularized according to the grammar of Panini, no noticeable change of this language has taken place for a long time now.