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Linguistics

LINGUISTICS has a long background of prescientific observation. The first men who thought about how speech sounded, who noticed that one utterance partially resembled another, with similar relations between the resembling parts and the rest of the utterances, or who set out to imitate the slight but systematic differences in speech of neighboring groups—all these were primitive linguistic analysts. Our biological ancestors—direct or collateral—were, by definition, human beings from the time they invented language and thereby became capable of transmitting the other systematically patterned inventions which, together with language, constitute human culture. The scientific observation and analysis of language comprise the subject matter of the science of linguistics.

Linguistics in America began with the early accounts of American Indian languages by the Spanish fathers and other pioneers. Roger Williams, among his other accomplishments, wrote a description of an Indian language, and Thomas Jefferson interested himself in the languages of the Indians. The American Philosophical Society numbered among its early members persons interested in the structure of Chinese and other "exotic tongues." For over a century the American Oriental Society has fostered linguistic studies. The American Ethnological Society and its younger sibling, the American Anthropological Association, concern themselves with American Indian languages. The associations of language teachers have always included members interested in language as such more than in literature or pedagogy.

European students became interested in the history and relationships of languages in the eighteenth century. Comparative and historical linguistics flourished especially in Germany and came to this country in the last third of the nineteenth century.

Thus linguistics in America has many roots—literary studies, philology, ethnological studies of Indians and other "primitive" peoples, historical interest in the peoples among whom Western culture developed. The Linguistic Society of America was founded in

1925, establishing its journal, *Language*. The society also participates in publishing the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, founded in 1917 by Franz Boas. An informal journal, *Studies in Linguistics*, has been issued since 1942 as an independent venture, and the Linguistic Circle of New York has published *Word* since 1945.

Boas trained his students in linguistics, as well as in other anthropological disciplines—ethnology, archaeology, folklore. His most brilliant student, Edward Sapir, trained many more, as did Leonard Bloomfield, Sapir's successor at Yale.

From 1925 the outlines of American linguistics have sharpened with the emphasis on techniques of description of linguistic systems. The analysis of the structure-points of the sound systems (phonemics) has been a primary interest. The analysis of grammatical structure, the next higher level of complexity, in terms of the forms themselves (morphemes) has occupied linguistics for some years and has recently turned to the study of the arrangements of such forms in constructions (syntax). Interest in historical and comparative matters continues, and the dialect geography of American English is being examined by the Linguistic Atlas project of the United States and Canada. In 1941, the late Benjamin Lee Whorf turned his attention particularly to the relation of language to other cultural systems—that is, the ways in which languages interact with, and influence, other things that human beings do. The second world war found linguists teaching languages, especially those little-known and previously unanalyzed.

As a full-fledged social science, linguistics interests itself in the relation of the data of language (micro-linguistics) to the physical and biological sciences (prelinguistics), and in the relation of these data to other anthropological data (metalinguistics). In this last field it hopes to contribute to the investigation of many problems confronting our world culture, particularly in interpersonal and international relations, and in communication as a whole.

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