

Tikrit University
Collage of Education for Humanities
English Department



Applied Linguistics
Higher Studies- M.A.
Language Descriptions (1)

Prepared by:
Prof. Dr. Istabraq Tariq Jawad

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1.1 Introduction

The importance of language description in applied linguistics has sometimes been questioned because of a perception that the theoretical insights of descriptive linguistics are different from the practical needs of language pedagogy. Linguistics has increasingly separated itself from a prescriptive view of language, which formulates rules for what should be said or written, in favour of a descriptive view, which seeks to record the language which people actually use. Contemporary language description, therefore, takes a synchronic approach, that is, language is described as it is at a particular moment in time and does not incorporate the history of the language (diachrony), although languages do of course change over time.

The descriptive view has led linguists to new insights about language and new ways of talking about and defining units of language.

About the difference between perspective view and descriptive view of language. The prescriptive view of language formulates rules for what should be said or written, prescribing how language should be used. It focuses on norms and standards, often based on traditional grammar rules. On the other hand, the descriptive view of language seeks to record the language as it is actually used by people. It takes a synchronic approach, describing language at a particular moment in time without incorporating its historical development. Descriptive linguistics aims to understand and analyze the structures and patterns of language, rather than prescribing how it should be used.

About how has pedagogical grammar evolved to incorporate more descriptive approaches.

Pedagogical grammar has evolved to include more descriptive approaches in recent years. Traditionally, pedagogical grammar focused on prescriptive rules and relied on the concepts and terminology of traditional grammar based on Latin and Ancient Greek. However, with the introduction of corpus-based materials into language classrooms, there has been a shift towards a more descriptive focus.

In this new approach, learners are encouraged to deduce grammar rules from linguistic data rather than relying solely on prescriptive rules. This means that learners are exposed to authentic language usage and are encouraged to analyze and understand the patterns and structures of the language. This approach aligns with the descriptive view of language, which aims to describe how language is actually used by speakers.

Furthermore, applied linguistics, which encompasses pedagogical grammar, has recognized the importance of language description as a central feature of its work. Areas such as first and second language acquisition have focused on describing learner grammars.

This integration of language description into applied linguistics has contributed to the shift towards a more descriptive approach in pedagogical grammar.

Overall, the inclusion of more descriptive approaches in pedagogical grammar has allowed learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language by analyzing real language data and patterns, rather than relying solely on prescriptive rules.

Descriptions of language are often divided into a number of categories and each of these categories has its own principles, concepts, and objects of study.

1.2 Phonetics

Most languages are transmitted by sounds and one of the most obvious differences between languages is that they sound different. The study of the sounds that human beings make in their languages is known as phonetics. While sign languages, such as British Sign Language and American Sign Language, are clearly not transmitted by sound, there are units in sign languages which correspond to phonetics and phonology.

1.2.1 Transcribing sounds We are used to the idea of representing language in writing; however, conventional writing systems are not adequate to represent sounds.

the need for a phonetic alphabet to represent sounds accurately, as conventional writing systems are not adequate.

the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which has over 100 symbols for different sounds, and phonetic transcriptions, which are written between square brackets.

in transcribing language, we can use narrow and broad transcriptions, which differ in the amount of detail they provide about the sounds. Narrow transcriptions are more precise and include minor variations, while broad transcriptions are more general and include only major distinctions.

The text gives an example of how the word pea can be transcribed in different ways depending on the level of detail required.

narrow transcriptions are important for some fields such as speech pathology or forensic phonetics, but broad transcriptions are usually sufficient for describing languages.

1.2.2 The sounds of language The core of phonetics is to identify the characteristics of the sounds which human beings can use in language. Sounds can basically be divided into two types: vowels and consonants. Vowels are produced by altering the shape of the vocal tract by the positioning of the tongue and lips. Consonants are sounds which are produced by a partial or complete constriction of the vocal tract.

1.2.2.1 Vowels Vowels are usually described by reference to five criteria, and these are adequate as a basic point of reference, although some vowel sounds require more specification:

- 1 the height reached by the highest point of the tongue (high, mid, low),
- 2 the part of the tongue which is raised (front, center, back),
- 3 the shape formed by the lips (unrounded or spread, rounded),
- 4 the position of the soft palate (raised for oral vowels, lowered for nasal vowels),
- 5 the duration of the vowel (short, long).

Using these features, linguists have constructed a set of standard reference points for describing vowels. These are called the cardinal vowels and are usually shown on a schematized representation of the mouth. In some languages vowels may be voiceless, that is, they are made without vibrating the vocal cords.

1.2.2.2 Diphthongs Diphthongs are vowels in which the tongue starts in one position and moves to another. Diphthongs are very common in English.

It is possible to have vowel sounds in which the tongue moves to more than one additional position during articulation. Some varieties of English in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand have triphthongs with three different tongue positions.

1.2.2.3 Consonants Consonant sounds have three basic features in their articulation: place of articulation, manner of articulation, and voicing. Place of articulation refers to where in the vocal tract the constriction is made using the tongue or other parts of the mouth. they either Bilabials ,Labio-dental, Dental, Interdental , Alveolar ,Postalveolar ,Palatal, Velar ,Uvular, Pharyngeal ,Glottal The manner of articulation refers to how the constriction is produced. They are Stop Fricative ,Approximant ,Affricate ,Nasal ,Lateral ,,Trill ,Flap or tap

When air is passed through the larynx, the vocal cords may either be spread or drawn together. When the vocal cords are drawn together they create a vibration and sounds made with such a vibration are called voiced sounds (e.g. English z, v), while sounds made with spread vocal cords are called voiceless (e.g. English s, f).

1.2.2.4 Suprasegmentals Individual sounds are considered to be discrete segments, however some of the sound properties of languages extend over more than one segment. These are known as suprasegmentals and include stress, pitch, and tone. Stress, tone, and

pitch are assigned to syllables or even longer combinations of sounds rather than to individual sounds. Stress refers to the prominence of a particular syllable in a word, usually the result of a difference in the loudness, pitch, and/or duration.

Intonation refers to a change in a pitch contour across the duration of a sentence, or other large unit of language. One very obvious use of intonation found in many languages is to use a falling pitch contour

1.3Phonology: Speech Sounds as a System

No language has all the speech sounds possible in human languages; each language contains a selection of the possible human speech sounds. As such each language has its own pattern of sounds. This study of sound patterns is known as phonology and the speech sounds are known as phonemes. The focus of phonology is to determine the ways in which speech sounds form meaningful systems within languages. The essential property of phonemes is that they contrast with each other. For example, we can tell that the sounds [f] and [v] represent two phonemes in English because they contrast in words like fine and vine, which differ only in terms of the voicing of the initial fricative but which have very different meanings. Two words that contrast in meaning and have only one different sound are known as minimal pairs.

In each pair of words, the sound is phonetically different because of the different environment (e.g. /p/ is [ph] initially but [p] after /s/), but the sounds are still perceived by speakers of English as the same phoneme as there is no meaningful contrast between the sounds, and substituting one for another would not produce a different word, just an unusual pronunciation of the same word. Where two or more sounds represent the same underlying phoneme we call these allophones.

1.3.1 Phonotactics

Just as languages have different phonemic inventories and different allophones, they also have different possibilities for combining sounds into syllables, or different phonotactics. Syllables are phonological units consisting of one or more sounds and are made up of a nucleus (the core of the syllable made up of a highly sonorous segment, usually a vowel), with possibly an onset (a less sonorous segment preceding the nucleus) and/or a coda (a less sonorous segment following the nucleus). The nucleus and coda together are known as the rhyme.

All syllables must have a nucleus. Some languages do not allow syllables to have a coda, e.g. Samoan. Other languages allow for more complex syllables with consonant clusters in the onset and possibly in the coda .

Languages also have phonotactic constraints on what can occur in a particular position in a syllable. For example, English does allow for CCC onsets.

Different languages have different constraints. Some languages allow for some consonants to be nuclei. Other languages restrict what can occur in the coda.

1.4 Morphology

Morphology deals with the way in which words are made up of morphemes, the smallest meaningful units of language. If we take a word such as *untied*, it is clear that this word consists of three smaller meaningful pieces, three morphemes: the root *tie*, the prefix *un-* and the suffix *-d*. Morphemes can be divided up into various crosscutting categories.

Morphemes can be lexical like *tie*, with full, complex meanings. Or they can be grammatical morphemes, like *-d*, where a speaker does not really have a choice; the grammar of the language simply requires the morpheme to be present if the action occurred in the past.

Morphemes can also be divided into free and bound morphemes. Free morphemes are those which can be used on their own, like *tie*; bound morphemes are those which, like *-d*, have to be attached to another morpheme (symbolized by the hyphen).

Morphemes can be talked about in terms of their productivity. Some morphemes are highly productive: the past tense morpheme in English can occur on any verb. At the other extreme are completely unproductive morphemes. The most famous is the morpheme *cran-* found in the English word *cranberry*. *Cranberry* is a type of berry, and we can split the morpheme *berry* off, leaving us with *cran-*, which does not occur anywhere else in English. Other morphemes fall between these extremes of productivity, so that *un-* occurs on some, but not all, verbs (*untie* but **ungo*, where the asterisk indicates an ungrammatical word or sentence); and *-hood* occurs on some, but not all, nouns (*motherhood*, **tablehood*).

A single morpheme may appear with different forms in different words. The words *horses*, *cats*, *dogs*, and *oxen* all have suffixes showing that more than one entity is being talked about, but this plural suffix has different forms, called different allomorphs. Some of these allomorphs are phonologically conditioned, with the form depending on the final phoneme in the root – the form [éz] occurs after the sibilant (s-like) sound at the end of *horse*, [z] occurs after the final voiced phoneme at the end of *dog*, and [s] occurs after the voiceless phoneme at the end of *cat*. Sometimes allomorphs are lexically conditioned, the form is exceptional and depends simply on the root – we would expect the plural of *ox* to be *oxes* with [éz], but it is not, and speakers simply have to learn this about the word *ox*.

Morphemes can be of different types, the bound grammatical morphemes are affixes, where a morpheme is attached in front of a root (a prefix like un-) or behind a root (a suffix like -s). There is another rarer type of affix, an infix, where a morpheme is placed within a root. For example, in Chamorro, spoken on the island of Guam, there is a root chocho meaning 'eat'. In order to use a verb such as this in a sentence like 'I ate', an infix -um- must be placed after the first consonant phoneme, giving chumochoch. It is not the case here that ch, um and ochoch are separate morphemes – by themselves, ch and ochoch do not mean anything. The two morphemes are chocho and -um-, it is just that -um- is placed after the first consonant inside the morpheme with which it combines.

One morphological process which occurs in some languages is reduplication, which may be full or partial (depending on whether the whole word or only part of the word is reduplicated). For example, toko is Indonesian for 'shop', and toko-toko means 'shops'. In Ancient Greek, the perfect form of the verb commonly has a partial reduplication of the verb stem, so that the verb root pau 'stop' becomes pepau (with a repeating of the initial consonant of the root) in a verb form such as papal-k-a 'I have stopped'.

Another morphological process is compounding, where two roots are combined to form a single new word. For example, the roots black and bird can be compounded to form a new word blackbird with a different meaning; from boy and friend we can form boyfriend. Some languages have much more productive compounding than English.

Morphological processes are often divided into two types, inflection and derivation, although the distinction is not always clear. Given an English root consider, we can make forms like considers and considered, but also forms like consideration and considerable. The unsuffixed form and the first two suffixed forms are different forms of the same lexeme – if you want to look considered up in a dictionary, you look under consider, it's just that if an action happened in the past, the grammar of English forces you to add the inflection -ed. On the other hand, -able is a derivation, it derives a new lexeme considerable, which you would look up by itself in the dictionary. Inflections are highly productive (they apply to all or nearly all roots of a word class), semantically transparent (the meaning of considered is 'consider' plus past tense), and do not change word class (consider and considered are verbs); derivations are not necessarily productive (*goable), not necessarily semantically transparent (what is the relationship between consider and considerable?), and may change word class (considerable is an adjective).