

# Some Practical Linguistic Tools for Foreign Language Education\*

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## Abstract:

*Education is the fundamental requirement for the development of not only the human life but also of the nation. The paper explains how education, which is part and parcel of our development scheme, can be benefited a lot if it imbibes some of the principles of linguistics. The paper demonstrates at every section how some practical tools of linguistics can help in accelerating the process of learning a language, specially a foreign language. It helps to examine the components of language such as sound, syllable, words, and sentences and shows how a careful analysis of these components can facilitate in acquiring the properties of a foreign tongue which might be totally absent in the language of the learners. The trouble in distinguishing the difference between 'l', 'r' for Koreans might be one just case, however, they can overcome this by understanding and utilizing the tools of 'Phonetics' provided by the discipline Linguistics. The small training in word and word-parts techniques helps immensely in building up very useful vocabulary that is needed for the day to day use of a foreign language and this is facilitated by the sub-discipline 'Morphology'. Similarly, the 'Syntax and Semantics' help the foreign language learners and teachers to master the structure of sentences and meaning respectively. There is also an effort to show how various co-relational properties of languages can be easily mastered in learning a foreign language if we are aware of some techniques of language compare and contrasts that we learn in 'Language Typology' in linguistics. The translation from language to another can be targeted with much ease and competence if we are well versed in the techniques and tools of linguistics. Nevertheless, as an educator or a foreign language teacher, one also needs these tools to make his pedagogical material and methodology more meaningful and fetching better result.*

**Key words:** Education, foreign language, human life, linguistics, sound, syllable, words, phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, teaching and learning.

## 1. Introduction

In the present paper, I will examine the role of some core linguistic tools related to sound, syllable, words and sentences that are very useful in teaching and learning a foreign language. The pedagogical materials which are designed base on the techniques that linguistics offer to language teaching programs have always been very successful in carrying out the tedious task of a foreign language teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are complements to each other and the epicentre of education system. Education

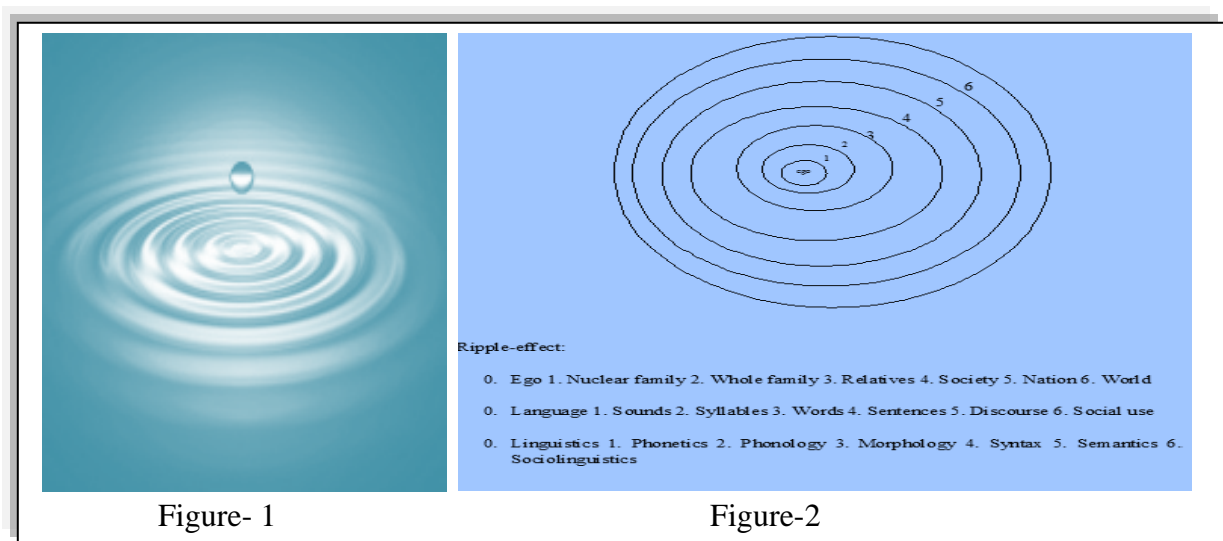
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is defined in a variety of ways. However, the centrality of all the definitions has always remained the same and they all uniformly emphasize that the main purpose of education is to impart the knowledge. The medium through which the knowledge is imparted under any education system is the language, including the part of education system of the ancient India which was oral. In other words, language no matter oral or written has served as the basis for human knowledge. Knowledge is an inseparable part of education. An overall transmission of knowledge is possible if we pay proper attention to the medium (vehicle) of knowledge. And, no one can deny the fact that language is the medium (vehicle) of knowledge. Language is a way of life in every sense. I find it almost inconceivable to think of any sphere of life possible without the presence of language, no matter it is covert or overt. This is probably the reason that one of the oldest texts of Indian tradition, *Rig-veda*<sup>1</sup> defines language as ‘.... language cuts FORMS in the ocean of REALITY’, (Rig-vedá: 1-164-45). How do we analyze this quote from *rig-veda*? It seems to me that if we take the help of what is called the theory of ‘ripple-effect’ and apply it in the field of language learning, it will be very simple for us to understand the complex theme of the quote from *rig-veda*.



<sup>1</sup>(source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rig-Veda> ) The Rigveda (Sanskrit: ऋग्वेद Rigvedá, a compound of ric "praise, verse"[1] and veda "knowledge") is an ancient Indian sacred collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns. It is counted among the four canonical sacred texts (śruti) of Hinduism known as the Vedas. Some of its verses are still recited as Hindu prayers, at religious functions and other occasions, putting these among the world's oldest religious texts in continued use. It is one of the oldest extant texts of any Indo-European language. Philological and linguistic evidence indicate that the Rigveda was composed in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent, roughly between 1700–1100 BC[4] (the early Vedic period).

The quote from *rig-veda* says that the language has the natural inherent capacity to cut or compartmentalize the reality of life in different forms or sets. The ripple-effect too entails the same fact in different words. The universe is like a pool of water and any thought or image is like a droplet. This droplet falls into the pool of water and creates the ripple-effect, very similar to what *rig-veda* says cuts the forms in the ocean of reality. The ripples start strong at the source of entry and gradually become gentler and gentler and finally the ripples carry on into the infinity of possibilities and finally they merge into the universe.

If we look at how the language education or learning takes place and what is the core effect of this learning into the making of our knowledge about the world, we would find a similarity to the *ripple-effect theory*. When an idea or image comes in our mind, the gradual submersion of idea or image happens from ego to nuclear family and then from nuclear family to whole family and then to our relatives and then to the society we live in and then to the Nation and finally to the whole World. This is my perception of the knowledge that is acquired through the language and I perceive it as the *ripple-effect* of droplet into ocean and this can make us understand the importance of education in a better way. When I will explain the use of the linguistic tools that are very useful into foreign language teaching or learning, I will show how this *ripple-effect* of acquisition of knowledge can be used to explain various layers of human language and how each layer of language is explained and cared by the discipline 'linguistics'.

The discipline, '*Linguistics*' provides a thorough explanation to the main components of language such as 'form, function and the context'. These components are very important especially when we engage ourselves in teaching or learning any foreign language. The discipline 'foreign language education' can enrich its myriad applications and ascertain marvellous results if it could incorporate some of the basic requisite knowledge of linguistics in its curriculum. Since language education can not do away with the use of language, it does bear a very distinct relationship with linguistics and it remains a salient part in every sphere of teaching and learning a foreign language. Linguistics can benefit the foreign language teaching and learning both in formal activities within controlled and planned educational institutions, and also in informal activities such as upbringing of children or helping adults who wish to learn a foreign language. Since language is needed as the most distinctive means for human communication, and also for the transmission of cultural understanding, skills and value systems, its importance and dominance in most of the activities of foreign language education can not be ignored and thus needs to be studied and explained carefully.

## **2. Different theories for foreign language teaching/learning**

There are several theories<sup>2</sup> of foreign language teaching and learning. They are listed in the literature as follows; Grammar-Translation Method (1890s-1930s), Cognitive Approach (1940s-1950s), Audio-Lingual Method (1950s-1960s), The Direct Method (1970s), The Natural/Communicative Approach (1960s-2000s), Grammar-Translation Method (1890s-1930s), Cognitive Approach (1940s-1950s), Audio-Lingual Method (1950s-1960s), The Direct Method (1970s), The Natural/Communicative Approach (1960s-2000s), Total Physical Response/TPR (1960s-2000s), The Silent Way (1960s-2000s), Suggestopedia (1960s-2000s) and Community Language Learning/CLL: (1960s-2000s) etc. However, we know that none of these theories can be applied in totality to get the desired results. So, it has always been the case that the language pedagogy professionals have to devise their own method to teach the foreign language by incorporating the best part of some of these theories. The present paper is an effort to demonstrate that a method which can be devised by adopting some core linguistic tools will work as the complement to the existing methods/theories of the foreign language teaching and learning. The linguistic approach, of course, combines many of the techniques of language teaching and learning from two mainstream theories i.e. direct and communicative methods of language teaching and learning.

When we learn a foreign language, we learn to acquire the competence to express ourselves in a foreign tongue which has different sets of sounds, different words with different meaning and they are used through a different set of rules of a different grammar. It is also observed in many cases that the sounds, syllables, words and the grammatical rules that are there in the foreign language may or may not have the corresponding items in the native language. It is also likely that the counterpart sounds, syllables and words in the native language might have considerably different sets of meaning and usages and they might not help the learners in the learning of a foreign language. This is where the linguistic approach becomes very vital and useful for explaining the complexities of a foreign language. I will explain how some of the core branches of linguistics and the practical help that they provide at various stages of learning/ teaching the foreign language.

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<sup>2</sup> for more detail, see the web-link <http://www.linguistics.com/methods.htm>

### 3. Practically applicable tools of linguistics:

This section tries to enunciate the practical applications of some of the core linguistic tools provided by branches of linguistics such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics can prove very useful in explaining different layers of human language. Practically it is possible to apply these tools at every sphere of foreign language teaching and learning. These tools should not be viewed as the burdens on learners' account. At the outset, they might look difficult or unwanted and thus difficult to put in practice in any inter-disciplinary activities, however, I believe that the hurdle is not about the applicability of these tools but it is either the hesitation of over-worked educators or the biasness of the educators towards linguistics enterprise.

#### 3.a) A puff of air: Phonetics

In this section, the paper explains how linguistics deals with the physiology of human sounds. The explanation of sounds that is technically called 'phonemes' is very important in order to build up the whole architecture i.e. language. The process of explaining the physiology of human sounds may be very complex if we are doing any theoretical research in the field of Phonetics. However, for the pedagogical purposes, the discipline offers a simple explanation.

The sounds should be explained on the basis of 'place of articulation' and 'manner of articulation'. To simplify the process, I would explain the technique in terms of the following diagram:

Physiology of human sounds

m  
a  
n  
s  
e  
r  
o  
f  
a  
r  
l  
i  
c  
u  
l  
a  
t  
i  
o  
n

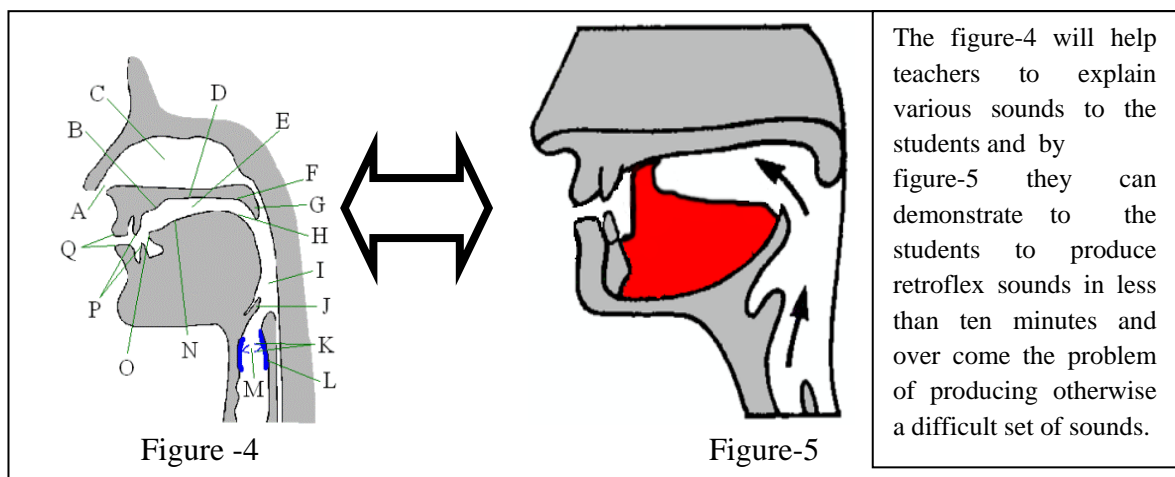
Where the sounds are produced: Places of articulation											
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ			ʀ					ʁ		
Tap or Flap				ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

**THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 1993)**

Figure-3

At the outset, the so called IPA chart might look complex, however, a short explanation of the diagram will not only make the IPA chart simple to understand but it will also make students interested in solving the problem of producing even those sounds which might not be the part of their native language. The teacher can explain that the horizontal line shows from where the sounds are produced and the vertical line explains how the sounds are produced. They can further specify that horizontal line which specifies the places of articulation of the sounds are actually the part of our ‘physical mapping<sup>3</sup>’ of the ‘speech production’ system and it uses lips, upper and lower teeth, soft and hard palates, tongue and velum to produce various kinds of sounds and thus the sounds are called bilabial, alveolar, dental, velar etc. as shown in figure-4. The vertical line needs some explanation because this represents the ‘manner i.e. how’ the sounds are produced. The articulators sometimes make complete closure, however at other occasions they produce friction by narrowing the gap between the articulators and thus we have different kinds of sound such as ‘stop, fricative, affricate’ etc. I agree with the argument that there should be no burden of these linguistic explanations of sounds when it is made the part of the curriculum of foreign language teaching and learning. However, a non-native speaker learning any Indic language has to be given the help from linguistics to produce the whole set of ‘retroflex sounds’ as shown in figure-5. The retroflex sounds are not easy to produce; however, it does not take more than ten minutes to learn the retroflex set for the student if the teacher gives the phonetic description of the sound based on the place and manner of articulation.



<sup>3</sup> A: Nose, B: Alveolar ridge, C: Nasal Cavity, D: Hard palate, E: Oral Cavity, F: Soft palate, G: Uvula, H: Back of the tongue, I: Pharynx, J: Epiglottis, K: Vocal cords, L: Food passage, M: Windpipe, N: body of tongue (middle part), O: tip of the tongue, P: Upper and lower teeth, Q: Upper and lower lips.

In order to produce a retroflex sound, we have to curl the tongue towards back in the oral cavity in order to touch the palate and release the closed air almost like flapping of the tongue (tongue curled so that the tip of tongue touches the roof of the mouth). If this is so simple, you can understand how easy it could be to overcome the problem of /l/, /r/ distinction that makes Korean, Chinese and Japanese feel embarrassed in several occasions.

A lateral sound requires us to curl the tip of the tongue and place it almost touching to the upper palate and let the air pass through the sides of the tongue. In terms of /l/ the tip of the tongue might touch the upper palate but for /r/, the tip of the tongue does not touch the palate. The process of letting the air pass through the sides of the body of the tongue is same as it is shown in figure-6.

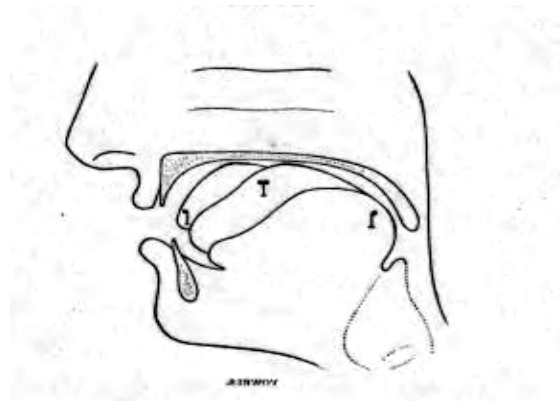


Figure-6

There are other advantages as well to use the knowledge of phonetics in the pedagogical practices of a foreign language; however, I believe to make the students overcome the difficulty of uttering non-native sounds in course of learning a foreign language is the most fundamental one.

### 3.b) Syllabicity of sounds: Phonology

The syllables are formed by putting meaningful phonemes together. Although a syllable can be formed just by a vowel and in fact every syllable must contain at least one vowel or vowel like sound. The most common and default syllable that are found in many languages has a consonant and a vowel which is represented as CV. There are some terminologies that are needed to be mentioned here in order to understand the form and function of the syllable. The basic elements of the syllable are **onset** and **rhyme** (i.e. **rime**). The onset in the syllable can be one or more consonants. The rhyme includes a vowel which is called the **nucleus**, and this is followed by again one or more consonants, known as **coda**. The figure given below shows the details in a diagrammatic

representation.

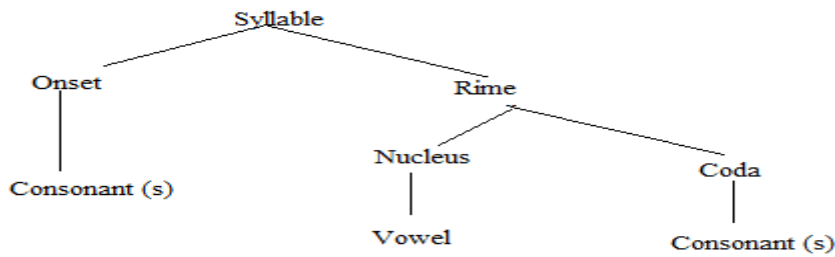


Figure-7

Phonology helps the foreign language learners in acquiring the knowledge of syllable and this helps the learners in identifying the syllables and thus can pronounce the words better. The identification of the syllables, of course, helps the students not only in pronouncing the non-native words with accuracy, but it also helps the students to know the word and their affixes<sup>4</sup>. The students understand the form and function of affixes better if they can segment these parts from the root words on the basis of the syllables.

There are phonological processes in every language such as **assimilation**, **dissimilation**, **neutralization**, **elision**, **epenthesis**, **coalescence** and **metathesis** which can be explained to the students learning a foreign language. Although these processes are prevalent in almost every language, it is not necessary to go into the technical details in order to explain all these processes. The teachers can simply show the pattern of the phenomenon to the students and explain these processes as pattern recognition and use the knowledge to accelerate the learning process of the foreign language. The following examples are useful to explain some of the facts I mentioned here.

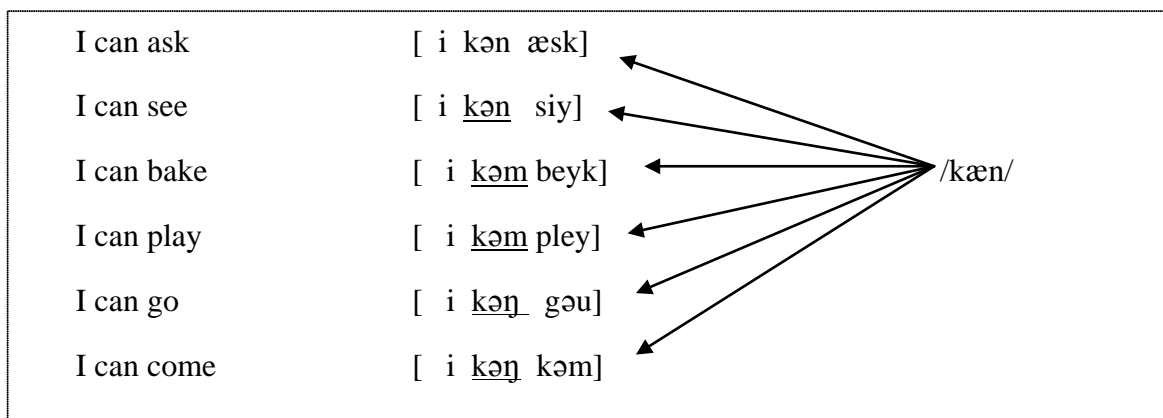


Figure-8

<sup>4</sup> Affix is an umbrella or cover term that is used in linguistics for all kinds of attachments to the simple words to make them complex ones. The common terms which are referred by the affix include 'prefixes, suffixes, infixes and circumfixes etc. There are some other terms as well that are denoted by the term affix, see the link <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affixes> for further details.

The change of /n/ into /n~m~ŋ/ takes place due to the neighboring sounds which are /s~b~g~k/ respectively. This is assimilation which entails that sounds in the word may take the characteristics of neighboring sounds in languages. The following examples are also commonly given for the case of assimilation in English. The negative prefix ‘in-’ changes in different forms such as /in~im~iŋ/ depending on the neighboring sounds such as dental (or elsewhere), bilabial and velar sounds i.e. /p(b)~t(d)~k(g)/etc.

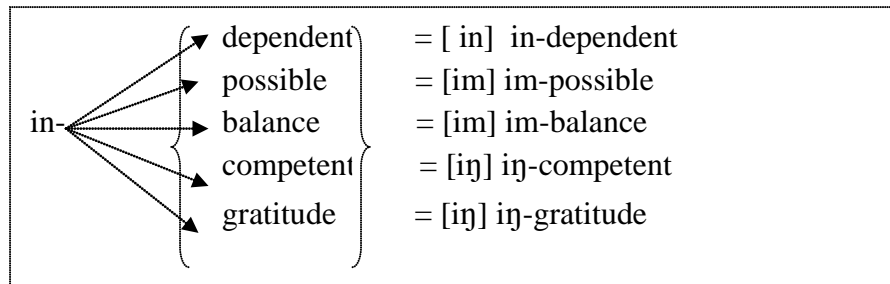


Figure-9

Before we close the section of phonology and talk about other disciplines of linguistics which help the foreign language learners and teachers, it is important to show the process of assimilation in Korean. Korean language is full of assimilations in various linguistic environments. The in left-right-bottom type syllables, most of the *siyats* [s] changes to *tiyat* [t], and this is a universal rule of phonology of Korean language. Some other examples<sup>5</sup> are as follows.

<b>Process of assimilation in Korean:</b>		
han-kuk-mal	= hanŋuŋmal	‘Korean language’
p <sup>h</sup> at-noŋsa	= pannoŋsa	‘(dry) field farming’
ap <sup>h</sup> -nal	= amnal	future (front + day)
c <sup>h</sup> ən-li	= c <sup>h</sup> əlli	‘natural law’
mul-nan-li	= mullalli	‘flood’
tul-namul	= tullamul	‘wild vegetable’
sipseup-nida	= sipseumnida	‘would like’ or ‘want’

Figure -10

The above examples of sound-changes in different environments are the clue as to how linguistics and its knowledge can help the foreign language learners and teachers to master the difficult concept in a non-native language.

<sup>5</sup> The examples are drawn from Iverson & Sohn 1994.

### 3.c) In Humpty Dumpty's world: Morphology

Morphology is the field of linguistics that provides very interesting insights for foreign language learners and educators. Morphology is a study of structure of the words. The structure of words makes the learner to understand the intricate nesting of the morphemes into the words. The words must be used carefully and the mastery of the art of the use of the words correctly makes the foreign language learners confident and competent. Let us see some examples.

Words	letters	syllables
a	01	01
on	02	01
the	03	01
poor	04	01
clear	05	01
centre	06	02
central	07	02
centralize	10	03
centralization	14	05

Figure-11

If we are happy to call all these units as just 'WORD', we are definitely missing out a great part of learning and teaching in our curriculum. We must keep in mind that I am not talking about either the number of alphabets or the syllables of these words. It is more than that. It is about the way the words are used by the native speaker in day to day communication. It is something that Lewis Carroll wants to convey through the conversation between Humpty Dumpty and Alice his novel to us. In morphology, a sub-discipline of linguistics, we try to do almost the same what Humpty Dumpty hints at when he says to Alice:

Humpty Dumpty appears in [Lewis Carroll's \*Through the Looking-Glass\*](#),

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"**When I use a word,**" Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "**it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.**"

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make **words mean different things.**"

"**The question is,**" said Humpty Dumpty, "**which is to be master – that's all.**"

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpty\\_Dumpty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpty_Dumpty)

Figure-12

The essence of this paragraph from Lewis Carroll is that you should devise some methods in terms of teaching or learning a foreign language that can give you the equivalent mastery that Humpty Dumpty talks in this paragraph to Alice. The linguists try their level best to equip the students with such morphological tools with which the students not only learn the required information of lexical items such as *boy*, *dog*, *cat* etc. but they also get trained with special insights through which they learn something special. For example:

<b>simple</b>	<b>Compound</b>	<b>complex</b>
an, in, the, and, of, party, south, when, a, unity, new, interim, into, practice, led, after, few, final, on, this, February, other, every, by, bill etc.	ladyfinger blueberry strawberry Whitehouse airport northeast southwest South-Asian East-Asian etc.	official, racial, national, instigated became, provisional majority, negotiated government, came provinces, cultural recognition, leaders traditional, amongst democratic, things etc..

Figure-13

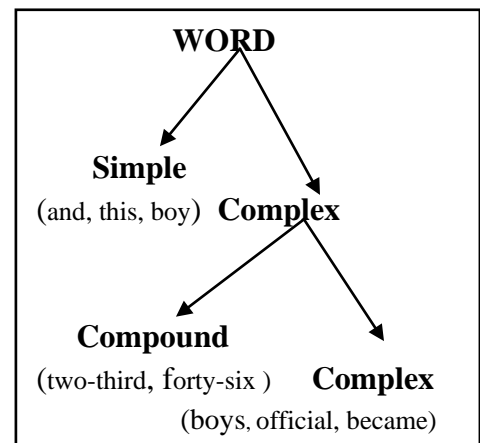


Figure-14

The above figures (13-14) show that a label ‘word’ is too broad a category and as we saw in figure-11, the range of linguistic units that this term can refer to is very vast and more importantly vague. It is, therefore, necessary for the teachers of foreign language to explain the concept of ‘*simple, compound and complex*’ words. It is also interesting that this classification is done in the similar way with that of ‘sentences’.

After the broad category of the words are classified into simple, compound and complex, the morphologists also provide a special insight to the foreign language learners by explaining how the simple words get transformed into complex ones. The affixes of different kinds are explained to the foreign language learners in details. The students are made aware that these affixes, though they cannot occur independently, are comparable to words with regards to the meaning, grammatical category and other linguistic information. This minute and subtle understanding of the affixes or bound morphemes enables the students to master the generative power of the affixes and they can formulate new words much quickly and appropriately. The figure-15 given below will demonstrate as to how

the students having learned the equivalent forms of the given generative categories<sup>6</sup> (i.e. N-V, V-Adj, V-N etc.) in any foreign language can accelerate the process of learning the language in a very easy way.

For example, they learn the lexical-like information i.e. the meaning, grammatical class and the origine of even bound morphemes such as, ‘-al’, ‘-ize’, ‘-ation’, ‘-ize’, ‘-ive’ etc.

Let us see some examples to make it sense what I am trying to say:

Word:	word-part (morpheme)	example
Centre	-al ‘ <i>belonging to x</i> ’	<u>central, national</u>

**1. [V→N]**

‘-al’ Meaning: ‘doing the act of X’ Exp: **propose-proposal, refuse-refusal.**

‘-ation’ Meaning: ‘the result of ‘X-ing’ Exp: **realize-realization, appreciate-appreciation**

**2. [V→Adj]**

‘-able’ Meaning: ‘able to be X-ed’ Exp: **fix-fixable, move-movable.**

‘-ive’ Meaning: ‘having the property of doing X’ Exp: **interrogate-interrogative, negate-negative.**

**3. [N→V]**

‘-ize’ Meaning: ‘to put in X’ Exp: **hospital-hospitalize, capital (money)-capitalize.**

‘-fy’ Meaning: ‘to make of X’ Exp: **beauty-beautify, person-personify.**

Figure-15

Similarly, the morphological explanation of the verbal elements in any language provides the students with great insights and they not only understand the complex nature of the verb conjugation but also learn the difficult concepts like time, tense and aspects. The present paper can not do justice by explaining these concepts in details but I will try to summarize these concepts in simplified form.

The verb happens to be the most complex grammatical element in almost any language of the world. This statement does not find a place in present paper just because I have worked on several Indian languages or am trying to over generalize the concept of complexities of the verbal element. However, it is true that if a given language has rich inflectional markers for *Noun*, *Verb*, and *Adjectives*, the verb conjugation happens to be very complex in that language. Many of the European, Indian and African languages will justify this statement. Nevertheless, if a language like Korean, Japanese, Maithili, Bhojpuri and some other languages which are less inflectional in marking the grammatical properties of *Noun* and *Adjective* on the *Verb*, this does not ensure that the verb-phrase will be less complex in these languages. The verb-phase in these languages tends to include some sociological or

<sup>6</sup> There are ten such generative categories that can be easily formed in any given language. For details see <http://www.geocities.com/pradeepkrdas/grs.htm>

cultural factor such as honorific hierarchy as the linguistic feature to mark the complexity of the verbal element. The foreign language educators have to take these factors in consideration while devising the syllabi for language pedagogy.

### **3.c.i) The notion of Tense and Aspect**

It is difficult to define the notion of tense in absolute term. This is so because it requires us to know the concept of time that is technically needed to understand the term 'tense'. It is assumed that 'time' is *a continuous flow of events*. An event is an incident that is actually an action and is mostly denoted by the verb. So, if we want to understand what the term 'tense' means, we must propose a working definition of tense by saying that 'tense is an effort to locate or identify an action in the time scale'.

However, it appears that it is not so simple to categorize the notion of time beyond what we said earlier i.e. '*it is a continuous flow of events*'. This is partially so because no one can claim to know the starting and the end or any such referential point with regard to the notion of time. Yet, we find ourselves so confident in everyday life in talking about so many things that might refer to various points of references in time-scale.

It appears to me that this facility has come to us from grammar, where time is seen as a grammatical construct which holds important knowledge of the point of reference of an action. It is also important to note that if we do not have a shared knowledge of time, it would be literally impossible to have any communication in any given language.

So, there must be some way to handle this technical aspect of the notion of time that seems to work as the underlying form to let the notion of tense emerge as one of the basic components of universal grammar. If we think carefully, we would come to this consensus that there must be the following three factors that can help in establishing the overall, though individual, knowledge of time:

- a. Knowledge of time through our experience
- b. Knowledge of time that we gather from books, specially the history books
- c. Knowledge of time through unquestionable conventional belief (various kinds of narratives)

These three factors contribute immensely in establishing the knowledge of time for every individual. I have been talking about individual's knowledge again and again in the paper. This is so because there seems to be a vast difference in the degree and range of knowledge of time amongst individuals. Despite this attested differences in the range and degree of knowledge of time, an amazing commonality is also discovered when we talk about any big/established/famous/memorable event e.g. 1947, 1945 in case of Indian and Korean history respectively, and 11<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2001 in case of American's life and 1914 or 1948 for the world.

There is a fundamental advantage to have the knowledge of present-time because this gives us a chance to know other references of time without any dispute. The knowledge of present time is a *self-attested knowledge* and it does not require any proof or justification for its existence. So, we could draw a time line as follows:

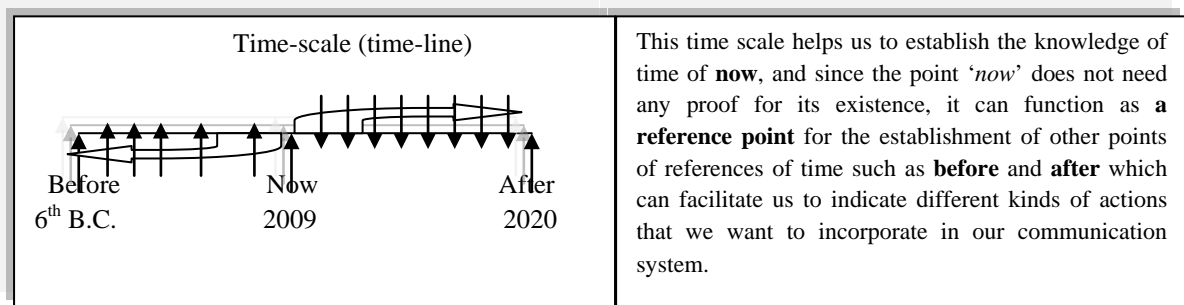


Figure-16

An example which shows how this system of time-scale works, will solve many queries that might be bothering the mind of the readers. Suppose we ask someone, 'how old is s/he?' And when we get to know that s/he is 29 years old, it takes us hardly a second or two to get to know this that s/he is born in 1980. I am sure that you would agree with me that it is simple. However, I want you to be conscious as to what did we do to get the year s/he is born. We seem to have subtracted 29 years from **now**, and we got the answer. This is what I meant when I said that the notion of the present time i.e. **now** does not need any proof and it is a *self-proven fact* and everyone agrees to this. Not only this, but it also helps us to find out other point of references and thus we know other references of time such as past and future.

If we turn our attention now to the allocation of actions onto different points of references of time and see how the term 'tense' is conceptualized out of the

combination of time and action on the time-scale, we would come to the following diagram.

The formation of tense-scale with the help of that of the time:

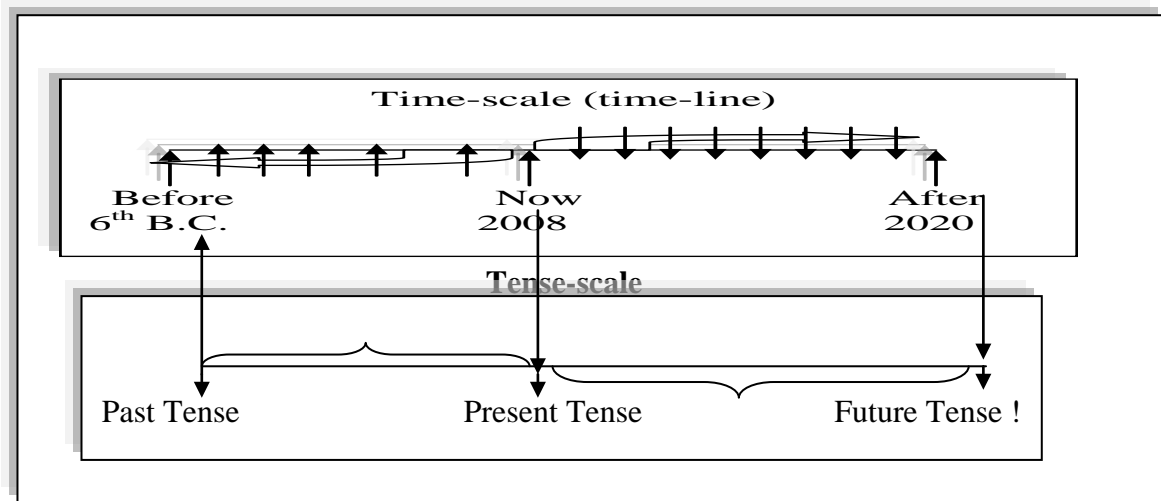


Figure-17

The above diagram explains how we get the notion of 'tense' formed by plotting or allocating the time and action together. In other words, if we know *when* an action is done, we can conveniently talk about different tenses with the help of the reference of time. The present tense is about an action that is done at the reference point of time termed as *now*. However, actions that are done *before* the time reference of *now* must fall under the Past tense. Finally, those actions that are planned to be done during the period of *after* from the time reference of *now*, is called Future tense.

There are some theoretical as well as pedagogical problems with this Anglo-centric classification of tenses but I will keep those issues aside at the moment as this will divert our attention from what we intended to do here. This classification of tense and its relationship with time seems convincing at the macro level i.e. locating an action in the time-scale and this will facilitate us to understand as to how the concept of time is imbedded into the explanation of tense as a grammatical category. However, there seems to be problems if we examine the concept of time at a micro level of the distribution of actions denoted by the verb at a given point of time. Look at the following diagram to understand what I intend to say.

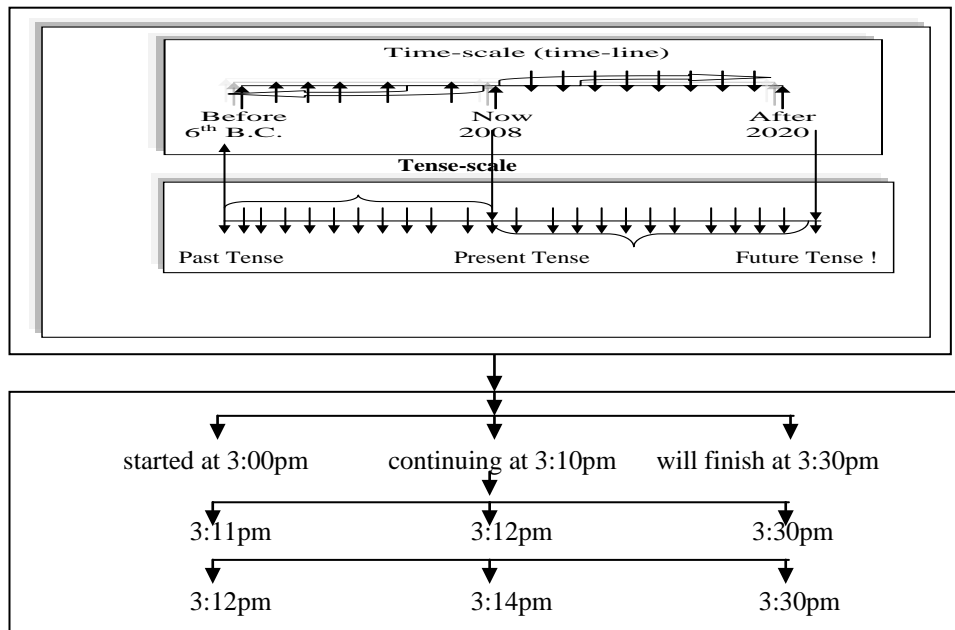


Figure-18

If we examine the above diagram carefully, we will come to the conclusion that we might get trapped into the web of circularity. An action that seems to take place in present time shows this problem. For example, if I talk about my teaching of a class in any given day, I would say that I start-**ed** teaching my class at 3:00pm, I am teach-**ing** my class *now* at 3:10pm and I **will** finish it at 3:30pm. Now, this looks very problematic, because if you pay attention, you would realize that I have used all three tenses in my statement in talking about the actions that take place in present time. Moreover, by the time I finish saying all this, the time 3:11pm is again past and 3:12pm is present and 3:30pm still remains future and so forth.

It is for this reason that the grammarians have introduced a new term called '*aspect*'. If tense tells us as to when the action is done, aspect tells about how or in what way(s) the action is done. Aspect is of four different types i.e. four different ways of doing an action. It is really a sad affair that the pedagogical materials that are prepared for foreign language teaching and learning somehow ignore this important issue of language teaching. The students, in the absence of such explanatory help, have to memorize most of the forms of the verb conjugation. This is a big burden on the learners account for any foreign language. It is needless to say that languages like French and German and many other languages have very complex verb conjugation. If we popularize the linguistic approach and put some efforts in devising the pedagogical materials and explain these concepts in details, the foreign language learners will enjoy the learning of a language than getting

burdened to memorize the never ending tables of verb-conjugations. Let us see the following diagram to make sense what it means to say that there are four different aspects.

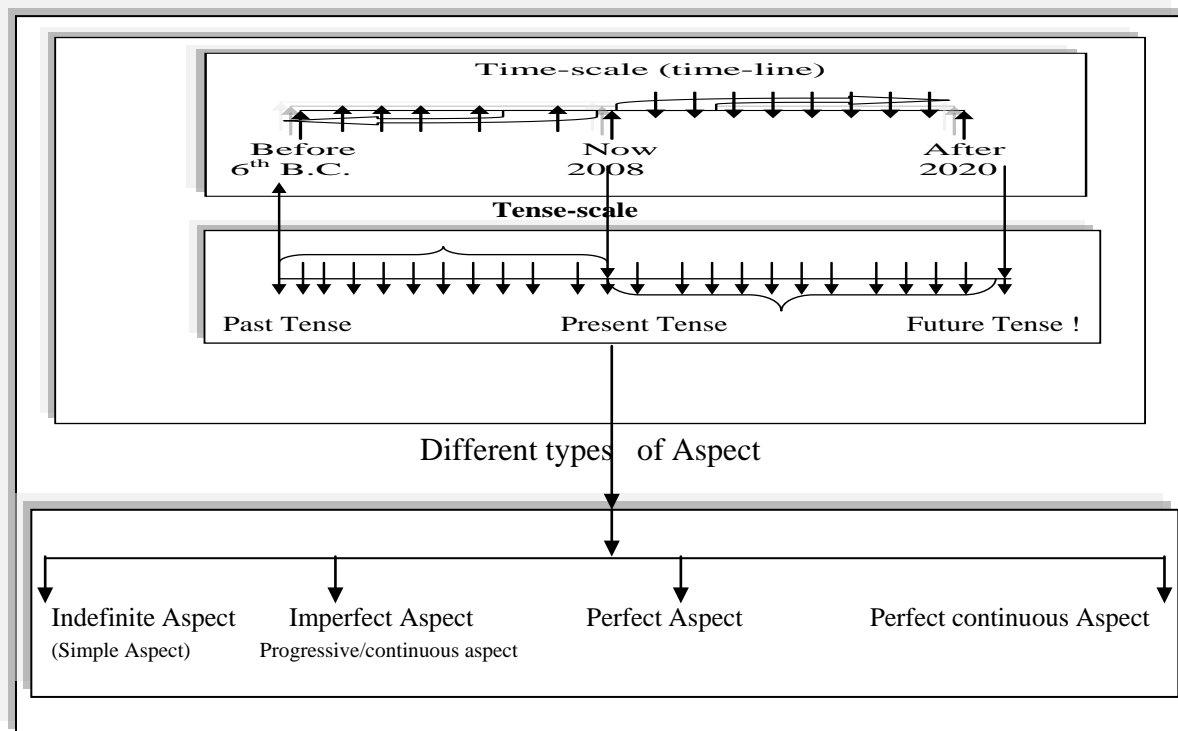


Figure-19

With this diagram of aspect, the notion of time, tense and aspects seems to complete now. However, it is but necessary to provide with some explanation as to how this whole system works. Let us see the following description for different time, tense and aspects:

**1. Present indefinite tense:**

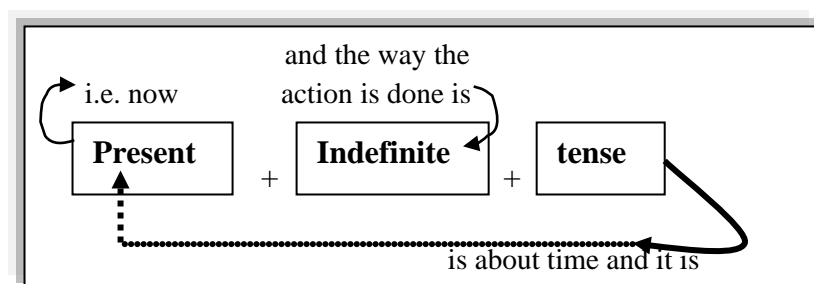


figure-20

The category of tense is a combination of time and action and if we try to find out as to when the action is done or at what time the action is done, the label present in the string will tell us that it is now i.e. at the time of speaking. The remaining term 'indefinite' in the string should indicate that the way in which the action is done is indefinite i.e. there is no definite answer as to whether the action is finished or not. In fact, other than stating that

the action takes place in present time of speaking, no other information is given by this aspect. Thus, in an example, ‘I go to school’, there is no information with regard to the verb (action) whether I reached school or not.

## 2. Present imperfect tense:

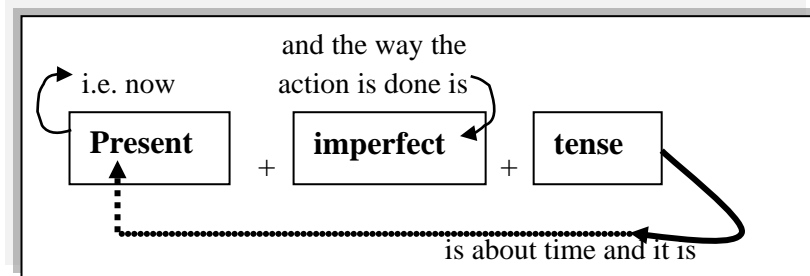


Figure-21

The second aspect which is known as ‘present imperfect/continuous/progressive tense’ could be explained in this way. The tense would tell us about the time and we have to find out when the action takes place. The term ‘present’ will tell us about the time i.e. now or at the time of speaking, and the term ‘imperfect’ will tell us the way in which the action takes place. This category of aspect is better than the first one, because this informs us better than the first one. The term imperfect/continuous/progressive tells us that the action is not yet completed and it is in progression at the time of speaking. So, when we say, ‘The boy is writing a letter’, the action described by the verb is witnessed to be in progression.

## 3. Present perfect tense:

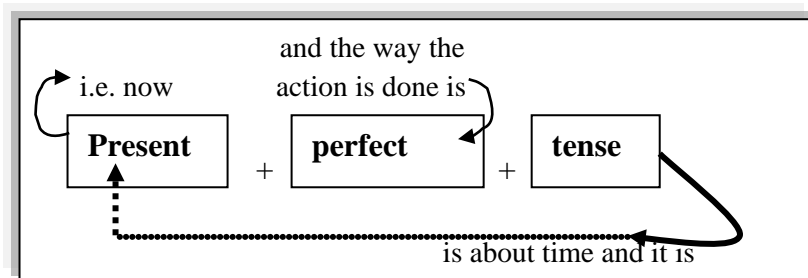


Figure-22

This category of aspect seems to be the best one in terms of providing the information about the way in which the action is done. Most of the things that we have talked about earlier happen in the similar way. The tense would tell us about the time and for time we need to go to the term ‘present’ and this will tell us that the action takes place ‘now’ or at the time of speaking, and the aspect marker ‘perfect’ will describe in what way the action is done. There is an important point about perfect aspect that we must explain here. It is

not necessary that in ‘present perfect aspect’, the action has to be done always at the time of speaking. The logic is that the effect of the action must prevail in present time or at the time of speaking. Let us explain this with an example. Suppose, a teacher asks his/her students, ‘Have you done your homework?’ The students reply, ‘Yes, we have done our homework’. The issue is that no one did the homework at the time of speaking, but all of them said that they have done the homework. What does this mean? As I mentioned earlier that it is not necessary that the action has to be done at the time of speaking with regard to the ‘present perfect tense’ rather what is necessary is that the effect of the action must prevail in the present time or at the time of speaking. Similarly, if you are offered a lunch and you say, ‘I have taken my lunch’ and this does not mean that you are taking lunch or have taken lunch in front of the person who asked the question, but the effect of your taking lunch still prevails at the time of speaking.

#### 4. Present perfect continuous tense:

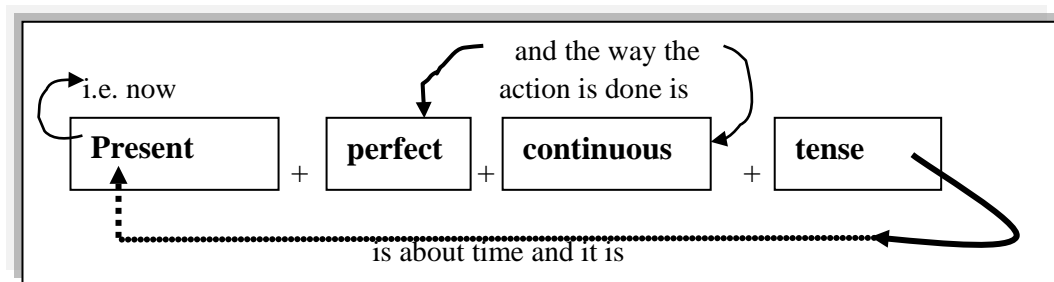


Figure-23

In this category of aspect too, the term tense would tell us about the time and time factor would be explained by the word present i.e. *now*. The way in which is the action is done in this category is called ‘perfect continuous’. The ‘perfect continuous aspect’ is an interesting aspect in English and also in some other languages. It seems that there are some actions such as ‘writing a book, teaching a course, and building a house etc.’ are such actions which would demand not one but a combination of two aspects in order to explain the way the action is performed. The actions mentioned earlier are such that they can not be finished in one given time. It is therefore, we have a combination of two aspects in English which will explain that the action is started and finished at a given point of time but it would again continue later as well.

Many languages of the world do not categorize the action in this way and thus would manage with the imperfect/continuous aspect itself. Therefore, instead of four aspects, many languages have only three aspects. We, however, would keep this category as well for the purpose of a unified approach. It is always possible to formulate a sentence for

‘perfect continuous tense’ in many languages. The explanation would prove very fruitful for the foreign language learners and the students would understand the complex grammatical concepts of time, tense and aspects. The next section would show how these theoretical linguistic tools will be applied in Hindi language. The morphological processes in Hindi are quite complex and the application of the tools in Hindi ensures that if this works well in Hindi, it will work very well for other languages of the world.

### The application of the theory of tense and aspect for verb conjugation in Hindi

1. Present indefinite tense: लड़का किताब पढ़ता है | (The boy reads the book)

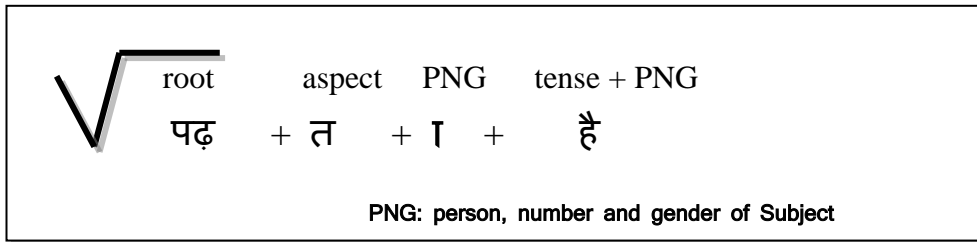


Figure-24

2. Present imperfect tense: लड़का किताब पढ़ रहा है | (The boy is reading the book)

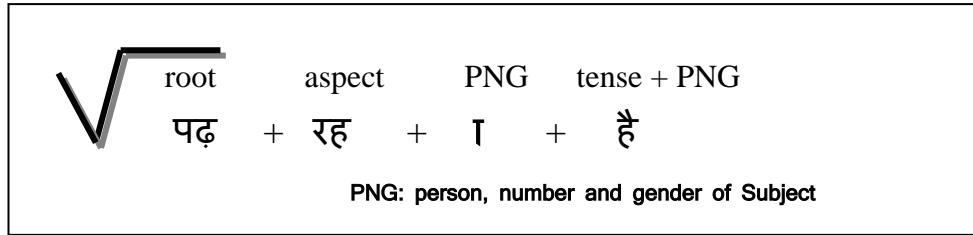


Figure-25

3. Present perfect tense: लड़के ने किताब पढ़ी है or लड़के ने रोटी खायी है  
 The boy has read the book. or The boy has eaten the bread.

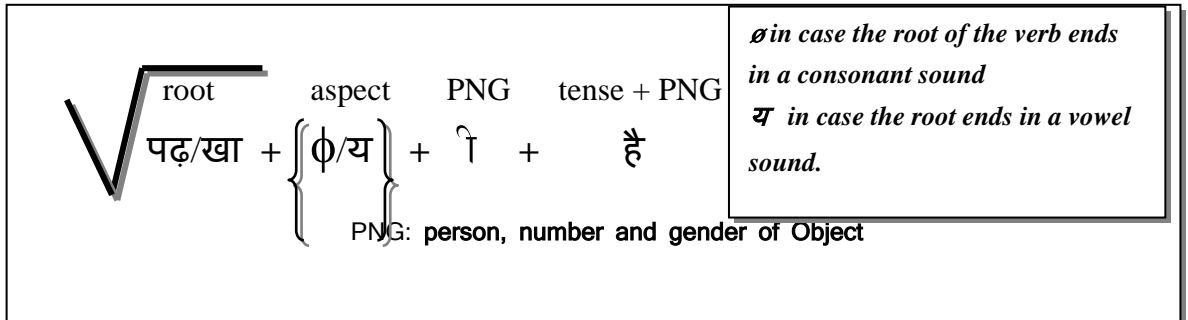


Figure-26

4. Present perfect continuous tense: लड़का सुबह से किताब पढ़ता रहा है |  
The boy has been reading the book since morning.

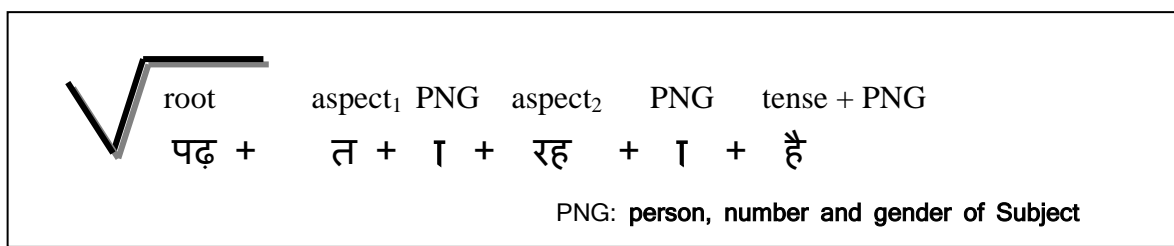


Figure-27

### 3.d) à la Chomsky: Syntax

Syntax has mostly been a theoretical area of research in linguistics. However, some sporadic works in syntax have focused on the applied aspect of syntactic research such as ‘*acquisition of second language syntax*’ and ‘*syntax of early stage*’ etc. With the advent of Chomsky in syntax, the discipline found a new research direction. The ‘innate-hypothesis’ that underlies the generative paradigm provides the logical base to the abstract syntactic rules and helps us to explain the properties of ‘universal grammar’. The ‘*phrase structure rules*’ (also known as PS-rules) helps us to understand the structure of the sentences and the process of human cognition. The generative power invested with these ‘PS-rules’ or syntactic rules is very useful and can help the foreign language learners in several ways to understand the structural dependencies of a foreign language. The very basic syntactic rules of sentence with a transitive verb can be given as follows:

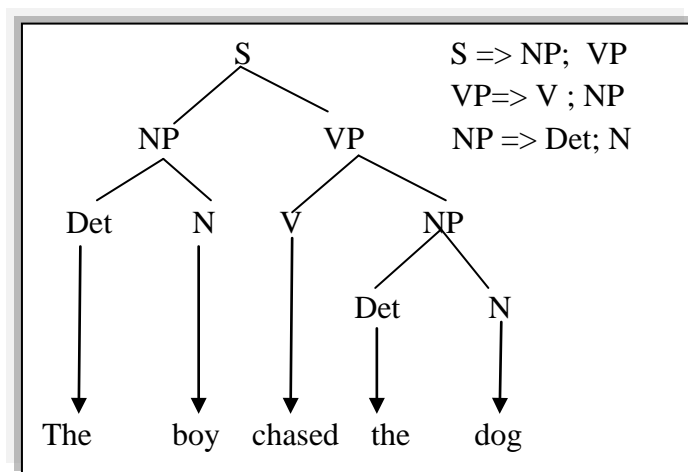


Figure- 28

The tree-diagram in figure-28 shows the structure of the sentence. It also describes the units of grammar i.e. the *phrases* which make the notional categories of the sentence such as ‘subject and object’. On the right hand side of the diagram, the phrase-structure rules of

this sentence are given. The salient feature of these rules is the semi-colon that separates the phrases. It implies that the phrases such as NP; VP can occur at any side in the sentence depending on the word-order of the language. The two simple PS-rules have great power of generating different types of ‘word-order’ that are found in different languages of the world. Let us see the practical demonstration of these two PS-rules and their usefulness.

**The two PS-rules:**

**S → NP; VP**

**VP → V; NP**

<p><b>(A)</b>  S → NP<sub>1</sub>; VP  VP → V; NP<sub>2</sub>  -----  This arrangement of PS-rules will generate SVO word-order:  Subj (NP<sub>1</sub>) V Obj (NP<sub>2</sub>)  English &amp; European lgs</p>	<p><b>(B)</b>  S → NP<sub>1</sub>; VP  VP → NP<sub>2</sub>; V  -----  This arrangement of PS-rules will generate SOV word-order:  Subj (NP<sub>1</sub>) Obj (NP<sub>2</sub>) V  Most Indian languages</p>	<p><b>(C)</b>  S → VP; NP<sub>1</sub>  VP → V; NP<sub>2</sub>  -----  This arrangement of PS-rules will generate VOS word-order:  V Obj (NP<sub>2</sub>) Subj (NP<sub>1</sub>)  Austronesian languages</p>	<p><b>(D)</b>  S → VP; NP<sub>1</sub>  VP → NP<sub>2</sub>; V  -----  This arrangement of PS-rules will generate OVS word-order:  Obj (NP<sub>2</sub>) V Subj (NP<sub>1</sub>)  Basque, Esperanto etc.</p>
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Figure-29

The distribution of just two PS-rules into the above four arrangements explains the generative power of the PS-rules in syntax. If we think about the usefulness of the syntax in foreign language education, we would definitely say that this can prove a very useful tool to explain the structural dependencies of the languages by explaining the syntactic structures to the language learners. This distribution of the PS-rules also highlights the ‘innateness’ hypotheses that works as the backbone of the ‘Universal Grammar’ proposed by Chomsky. These arrangements also entail as to why other two arrangement of ‘SVO’ into ‘OSV & VSO’ are not very common in the languages of the world. The phrase structure rules, which is considered to be the basis of ‘innate hypotheses’ of human language, do not generate the two abovementioned word-orders i.e. OSV and VSO. This is a great contribution of generative paradigm to the overall understanding of the human cognition process. Let us examine some other applications of these PS-rules in the field of ‘syntactic typology’ and demonstrate how the ‘word-order correlation’ can help the foreign language learners and teachers in explaining the structures of different syntactic constructions in different languages. We have already seen that the PS-rules play a vital role for the occurrence of the verb in different languages. Out of the four arrangements of the PS-rules, we can generalize a simple fact that languages seem to prefer just two systems where the verb can be either place at the final position or at non-final position.

Thus, the verb-final or non-final captures a great generalization of the above four distributions of the PS-rules in different languages. If we understand the intricate and abstract concept of this arrangement of the verb, we can have the following ‘typological’ classification of the different constituents in the languages of the world and the so called ‘correlation features’ of the constituents.

TABLE (1) Lehmann's Constituent Order Correlations

Word order/constituent order	Correlation
VO	OV
Preposition + noun	Noun + preposition
Noun + genitive	Genitive + noun
Noun + adjective	Adjective + noun
Noun + relative clause	Relative clause + noun
Sentence-initial question word	Non-initial question word
Prefixes	Suffixes
Auxiliary verb + main verb	Main verb + auxiliary verb
Comparative adjective + standard of comp	Standard of comp + comparative adjective
Verb + adverb	Adverb + verb
Negative + verb	Verb + negative
Subordinator + clause	Clause + subordinator

Source: Whaley 1997; Pp86

Figure-30

This particular ‘correlational feature’ table is very useful for the foreign language teaching and learning. It helps the educators to explain the structure of various constituents in different languages very well. We can achieve so much of acceleration in the teaching and learning of foreign language if we incorporate some of the basic and fundamental principles of linguistics in our curriculum.

Last but not the least, the passive rules in different languages of the world seems to follow a common linguistic feature. The main verb of the active sentence takes the perfective morphological marker and the thematic role of the subject and object is changed in some ways or other. However, if a student, learning a foreign language, is made to understand the concept of transforming an active sentence into passive in any language, s/he will have no problem to map the concept of this transformation in any given language. Let us see how an active sentence is transformed into passive in English:

Rules of Passive transformation in English:

- The first condition in English to transform an Active to Passive is that the verb must be a transitive one in the clause.
- Change the positions of the subject and the object.
- The verb of the sentence, having been changed to its V1 form first, must be transformed into V3.
- We must introduce a BE verb after the changed place of the Obj as the Subj of the passive.
- This Be verb must be given the left over TENSE marker of the original verb of the clause and should agree with the changed Obj that is the subj of the passive sentence.
- We can insert or place (optional, though) a BY phrase before the Obj of the Passive sentence.

If we want to see a pictorial manifestation of what these rules of passive in English should look like, we can have the following diagram:

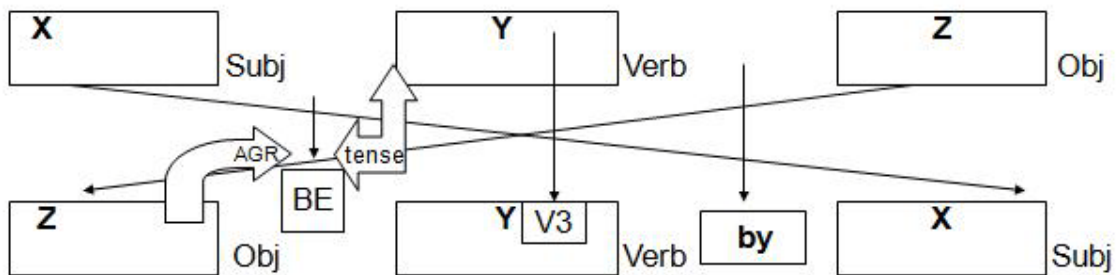


Figure-31

The syntactic representation of the active and passive sentences can be represented like the following:

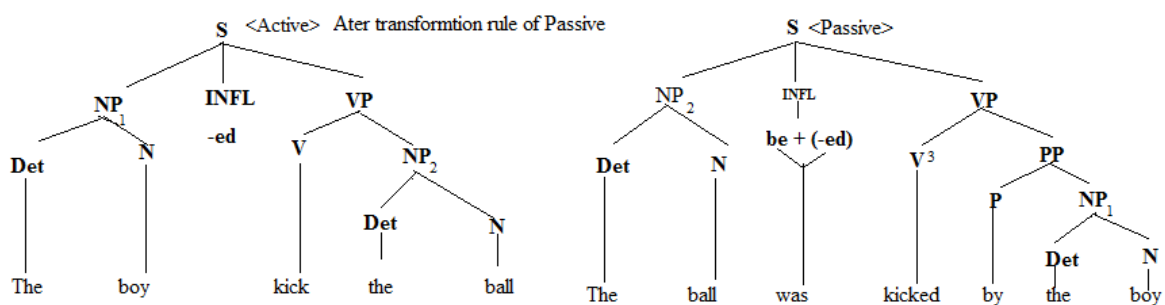


Figure-32

The above syntactic descriptions of different kind entail that syntax as a sub-discipline of linguistics can offer very useful devices to the foreign language education. Therefore, we must give a thought to incorporate the linguistic tools in the making of the curriculum of the foreign language education and there by help the foreign language learners to master

the conceptual structures of a language and the learners can apply the already learned conceptual structures of syntax on any language. I have already tried most of these linguistic applications in teaching Hindi as a foreign language and the results have always amazed me, and this is the reason that I emphasize so much for its incorporation in the curriculum of the foreign language education.

### **3.e) Decoding doubts: Semantics**

Semantics is a complex field of research in linguistics because it deals with the meaning of words and sentences. It is because of this reason that it becomes an essential part of human language. In the process of learning a language, the meaning is needed at every stage and in different forms. The beginners learn the meaning to merely understand the words; however, the advanced learners may need the meaning for some specific purpose, which actually means the mastery over the language. The foreign language education needs both of these levels of semantics. The basic distinction between the meanings of the lexical items is made on the basis of '*denotation*' and '*connotation*' axioms. The denotative meaning of a word refers to its 'conceptual' or literal meaning that is found in the dictionary of the language, whereas the connotative meaning refers to the 'associative' meaning of the word which could entail the other shades of meaning, and that can be acquired by the use of the language in different domains. These domains of language use depend on the learner's experience of real world than the linguistic world. Leech (1981) has explained that the associative meaning of an expression is related to individual's mental understandings of the speaker in the social contexts. He further divides the associative meaning into six different sub-types such as '*connotative meaning*', '*collocative meaning*', '*social meaning*', '*affective meaning*', '*reflected meaning*' and '*thematic meaning*'. These sub-types actually describe a composite of six modes of language usage and each of which reflects on certain mental connections. These mental connections are based on the contiguities of real-world experience of the language learners rather than the mere linguistic contexts of the language use.

As I mentioned above, a foreign language learner needs both of these levels of meaning components as the linguistic devices to enhance the competence of a foreign language. The denotative or conceptual meaning of the words enables the foreign language learners to acquire the literal meaning of the lexical items and distinguish them at various levels of 'lexical relations' such as 'synonymy', 'antonym', 'hyponymy', 'homonymy', 'homophony' and 'metonymy' etc. The associative meaning and its sub-types make the learners of foreign language proficient in usage of the language in various contexts. I

would like to highlight the two basic advantages of the contextual use of language and the role of meaning in language communication. The thematic-roles of the noun phrase in different context show the contextual property of language use and it is important to understand various thematic roles that the noun phrases can take in different domains. If the language learners miss this aspect of language use, there would be a breakdown in the communication system. Let us see the following example.

Marry	saw	a mosquito	on the wall.	She	borrowed	a magazine	from George,
<i>Experiencer</i>		<i>theme</i>	<i>location</i>	<i>Agent</i>		<i>theme</i>	<i>source</i>
and	she	hit	the bug	with the magazine.	She	handed	the magazine back
	<i>agent</i>		<i>patient</i>	<i>instrument</i>	<i>agent</i>		<i>theme</i>
to George.	“Gee thanks”	said	George.				
<i>goal</i>			<i>agent</i>				

**Yule, G. (1996; Pp. 117)**

Figure-33

These thematic roles are very essential part of language learning and this cannot be ignored specially in the foreign language teaching and learning. The conceptual understanding of these roles of lexical items makes the foreign language learners acquire the structural and lexical dependencies and in fact much more than that. Unfortunately, no theory of language teaching has ever looked at these aspects of language teaching and the result is in front of us. It is, therefore, but necessary to incorporate some of the linguistic tools in the making of the language teaching curriculum. The second and very useful help that semantic interpretation can extend to the language learners is the process of disambiguating the meanings by explaining the lexical item and its role that makes the sentence ambiguous. The following example will help understand what I want to convey to the readers.

**Example: The police killed the robber with a gun.**

**Two meanings:**

- a. The police killed the robber using a gun.
- b. The police killed the robber, and the robber was carrying a gun.

The above sentence is a very simple sentence in English. However, it can convey two different meanings if we think about the possession of the gun by the two actants in the sentence. The gun could either have been with the police and the police used the gun as an instrument to kill the robber. The second interpretation can be that the gun could be in the possession of the robber, and police killed that robber who had gun, and the police might

have used a revolver or something. Now, this ambiguity of the sentence can be explained to the students by presenting two different tree-diagrams to them where the possession of the gun would be shown differently. Let us see the diagrams.

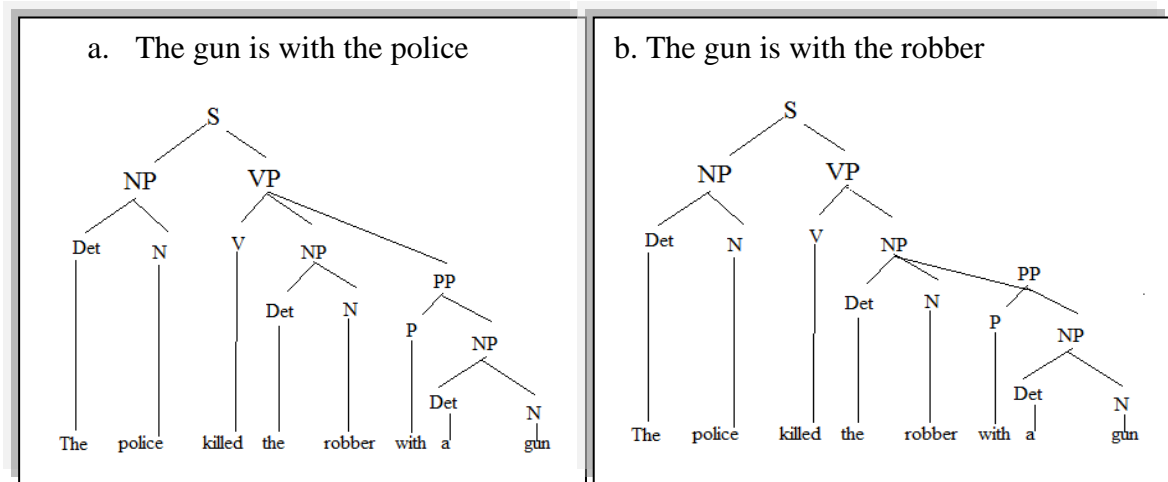


Figure-34

As the above two tree-diagrams show the usefulness of the semantic tools through which the students, learning foreign language, can benefit themselves immensely and enhance their process of learning by the techniques offered to them linguistics.

### 3.f) Societal adaptation: Sociolinguistics

I still remember when a learned and famous linguist told a sociologist once at UT, Austin, in a very complaining tone, ‘you might be doing sociology without giving any insight of linguistics to your students, but we (the linguists) do not do this and make sure that our students understand the value and importance of society, because there is no way to separate language from society’.

One of the burning examples that I remember and which correlates the above conversation of two learned people is that it is alright and perfectly acceptable to say, ‘I am hungry’ in English and thus students who learn Hindi tries to translate the equivalent of the expression in Hindi as ‘मैं भूखा हूँ =TrLit: *main bhukhaa hun*’. If you are not aware of the sociolinguistic aspect of language use and happen to use this expression in India, people will either ignore you as a foreigner or will be very upset as this expression has sexual overtone in its demand. An expression that is used in India to express the equivalent to English expression, which talks about ‘being hungry for food’ happens to be ‘मुझे भूख

लगी है = TrLit: *mujhe bhukh lagi hai* in Hindi. Now, it is just not possible either to notice this or know this aspect of language use unless we subscribe to various theories of linguistics that explain the important relationships of language and society. The relationship between the language and the society can be explained to the students by explaining the roles of 'main or dominant' language and the languages that are related to the main language and act as the varieties. The well-known term 'language and dialect' comes very handy in explaining the distinction that I mentioned above. The next important relationship between the language and the society is explained in terms of 'formal and informal' varieties of a language. The concept 'diglossia' can be explained to the foreign language learners to understand the situation if the target language enfolds the distinct 'high' and 'low' varieties at the communicative level in the society. There are some other concepts such as 'code-switching and code-mixing', 'bilingualism and multilingualism' etc. which might help the foreign language learners to understand the societal nuances of language use.

#### **4) Conclusion:**

The present paper has tried to explain how the core linguistic tools from phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics etc. can provide help to the foreign language learners in a systematic and periodic stage wise overall understanding and learning of the language. Language must be seen as a living organism, and the two salient features prove this point. One that it keep changing and developing like any organism and second that it has a very systematic links with its atomic units or elements such as sounds, syllable, words, meaning, phrases, sentences and finally the discourse. The linguistics tools that explain these units well further can empower the learners by providing them the three fundamental properties of a language i.e. perceptive power, conceptual power and communicative power. The branches of linguistics such as phonetics and phonology provide the perceptive power and morphology and syntax extend the conceptual power, while semantics and pragmatics (use of language) will give the communicative power to the language learners. Moreover, these abilities make the foreign language learners to learn the language in a way that seems to display the theory of 'ripple effect' in which the sounds merge into syllables and syllables into words, and words into phrases which finally give the sentences and the sentences lead to the discourse. Incidentally, the linguistic tools are also available in a hierarchical order where one is necessary for the others and they too have the similar 'ripple effect' pattern. The phonetics feeds to phonology and then

phonology helps the morphology in making the further units, and morphology further strengthens syntax in making sentences and finally discourse gives the insights of language use. I would conclude by saying the final line that the discipline of foreign language education must benefit from the available facilities in linguistics and attain the desired results in much faster and better ways.

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