

XXVI. LINGUISTICS

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This group sees as its central task the development of a general theory of language. The theory will attempt to integrate all that is known about language and to reveal the lawful interrelations among the structural properties of different languages as well as of the separate aspects of a given language, such as its syntax, morphology, and phonology. The search for linguistic universals and the development of a comprehensive typology of languages are primary research objectives.

Work now in progress deals with specific problems in phonology, morphology, syntax, language learning and language disturbances, linguistic change, semantics, as well as with the logical foundations of the general theory of language. The development of the theory influences the various special studies and, at the same time, is influenced by the results of these studies. Several of the studies are parts of complete linguistic descriptions of particular languages (English, Russian, Siouan) that are now in preparation.

Since many of the problems of language lie in the area in which several disciplines overlap, an adequate and exhaustive treatment of language demands close cooperation of linguistics with other sciences. The inquiry into the structural principles of human language suggests a comparison of these principles with those of other sign systems, which, in turn, leads naturally to the elaboration of a general theory of signs, semiotics. Here linguistics touches upon problems that have been studied by modern logic. Other problems of interest to logicians – and also to mathematicians – are touched upon in the studies devoted to the formal features of a general theory of language. The study of language in its poetic function brings linguistics into contact with the theory and history of literature. The social function of language cannot be properly illuminated without the help of anthropologists and sociologists. The problems that are common to linguistics and the theory of communication, the psychology of language, the acoustics and physiology of speech, and the study of language disturbances are too well known to need further comment here. The exploration of these interdisciplinary problems, a major objective of this group, will be of benefit not only to linguistics; it is certain to provide workers in the other fields with stimulating insight and new methods of attack, as well as to suggest to them new problems for investigation and fruitful reformulations of questions that have been asked for a long time.

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