How Modern is Modern Linguistics?

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Lecture vs. Conversation

We plan to have a ***conversation*** with you, not ***lecture*** to you.

That means we ask you questions, answer your questions, and comment on what you say.

The questions connect to the article, "How Modern is Modern Linguistics," but do not summarise the article.

Purpose of Our Questions

Our questions are meant primarily for Master's and PhD students, but we hope the others would also engage with them.

Goal: Learning from one another, as happened in universities like Nalanda and Takshashila.

Structure of the Session

1. Warming up
2. Higher Order Cognitive Capacities
3. Trans-disciplinarity
4. Education in the LLM Period
5. Epistemic Semantics
6. Challenges and Opportunities
7. General Q and A

A Warming-up Activity

We begin with some warming up activities, and are going to ask you questions on the

research methodology

of a project in the Department of Linguistics at Deccan College: *Survey of the Dialects of the Marathi Language (SDML)* (https://sdml.ac.in/methodology)

A Warming-up Activity

What is a ***SURVEY***?

What is the distinction between *surveys* and ***interviews*** as ***methodological strategies***?

What is the distinction between surveys of the ***DIALECTS*** of a language in a region, and surveys of the ***LANGUAGES*** in a region (e.g., Linguistic Survey of India by G. A. Grierson)?

A Warming-up Activity

What is a ***LANGUAGE?***

How do we distinguish between ***two languages*** and ***two dialects of the same language***?

How do we decide whether a given speech form is a *dialect of Marathi or of some other language*?

Analogy: "How do we distinguish between a species and subspecies in Biology? How do we decide whether poodles, German Shephard, wolves, and foxes belong to the same species or distinct species?

A Warming-up Activity

The Section on Data Collection Methods

Why collect data? What is the distinction between ***DATA*** and ***EVIDENCE***?

How do we gather data/evidence for other kinds of projects in linguistics? (e.g., data for the construction of a ***syntactic theory***?)

Question: Why **CHOOSE *survey of the dialects of Marathi*** as the main project, rather than the ***construction of grammars*** of the dialects of Marathi?

A Warming-up Activity

The Section on Grammatical Features

What is ***CASE***? What is the distinction between a ***case marker*** and a ***case feature***?

What is the distinction between the case markers/case features of:

nominative-accusative and ***ergative-absolutive***?

A Warming-up Activity

The Section on Grammatical Features

What is ***AGREEMENT***?

What are the types of agreement?
(e.g., modifier head, subject-verb, object-verb, pronoun-antecedent…)

What is the *rule/constraint/law* governing agreement between the verb and subject/object in Marathi?

A Warming-up Activity

The Section on Grammatical Features

What is a ***SUBJECT***?

How do we construct a theory of subjecthood to be used in the grammars of the dialects of Marathi?

How do we construct a theory of subjecthood to be used in the grammars of human languages?

A Warming-up Activity

Do the questions we have been asking come under ***modern linguistics*** or ***pre-modern linguistics?***

Is the linguistics you are familiar with modern or pre-modern?

Is mainstream (linguistics) education modern or pre-modern?

A Warming-up Activity

What is the relation between theories of:
(a) ***variation*** in biology / linguistics / chemistry,
(b) **evolution** in these disciplines?

What is the distinction between ***EVOLUTION*** and ***HISTORY***? Between ***history*** and ***ARCHEOLOGY***?

Is archeology a discipline or a methodological strategy in history?

What is HISTORY?

Reflecting on the Activities

What did you learn from these questions?

Could you have learnt what you have learnt if we had used the pedagogy of lecturing?

How are these questions relevant for the topic, "How Modern is Modern Linguistics"?

Summing Up

What were you hoping you would learn by engaging with these questions:

An experiential understanding of conceptual inquiry as a branch of academic inquiry/ research.

What is X, where X can be science, a discipline, linguistics, history, archeology, language?

What is the distinction between A and B? e.g.,case marker vs. case feature; subject vs. object; evolution vs. variation; evolution vs. history; …

Questions?

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Higher Order Cognitive Capacities

Do you judge these propositions to be true?

1. The earth revolves around the sun and rotates at an angle to the plane of revolution. (vs. the earth is the stationary center of the universe.)
2. Air and water are elements, gold is not (vs. Gold is an element, water is a compound and air is a mixture)
3. All life forms evolved from unicellular ancestors

Higher Order Cognitive Capacities

Do you accept these principles?

1. If we accept a set of statements as true, we must also accept their ***logical consequences*** as true.
2. ***Logically contradictory*** combinations of statements are false.
3. Human knowledge is uncertain and fallible.
4. We must doubt and question our own beliefs, as well as knowledge claims asserted by others, including those of our peers and of those that we judge to be authorities. (Gautama Buddha: *ehi passiko*, in the *kalama sutta*)

Higher Order Cognitive Capacities

Capacity for

Independent learning (learning on one's own, without having to depend on educational institutions)

Collaborative learning (from one another in a community of inquirers, as in the case of TakSashila and Nalanda)

Independent inquiry, as the foundation for research

Critical thinking and ***critical reading***, as the foundation for deciding on one's own what to believe and what to do

Clarity and precision in thinking & communication

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Trans-disciplinarity

Trans-disciplinary Concepts of Knowledge

Entities and their Properties

Structure, Function, System

Relations between entities, properties, and structures

Process and Change

Time and Space

History and Evolution

Trans-disciplinarity

Trans-disciplinary Concepts of Inquiry

Theory, Framework, Model, Properties and Relations

Theoretical vs. descriptive concepts

Prediction and Explanation

Correlation and Causation

Reasoning and Logic

Premises, Derivation, and Conclusion

Justification: Proof, Evidence, Arguments

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Approaches to Designing Curricula

A) **Evolutionary approach**: begin with the origin of the discipline and proceed to the evolution of the current state of affairs.)

B) Cover the **diversity of the different pursuits** as they exist currently.

C) **The Trunk-Branches-Roots approach**: Pick one or more dominant pursuits in the discipline (the trunks), and proceed to their current states of affairs (the branches and sub-branches), and then trace their evolution (tap root and the root branches)

Which of these approaches should we choose?

Approaches to Designing Curricula

Shall we choose (C), with the construction of theories of language structure (structure of sentences, words, syllables, phonological segments) as the ***TRUNK***. This would involve:

A) ***Representations of structure***

B) ***Laws/rules/constraints/principles*** that express the ***regularities in representations***

C) ***Derivation*** of the ***logical consequences*** (***Predictions***) of the combination of (A) and (B)

Literature Review and LLMs

PhD students in India are usually required to write a 'literature review' before they formulate their research questions and engage with the questions. Their PhD theses also require chapters on literature review.

Literature Review and LLMs

Given that LLMs can do a better job of lit. reviews:

should the practice of literature reviews be replaced by the practice of articulating questions, claims, and their branches, in the context of the existing body of knowledge?

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Words

On what basis do we decide whether these propositions are true?

1. ***All*** humans have/***Ever***y human has *exactly five* fingers / *more than five* fingers on each hand.
2. ***Most*** humans have exactly five fingers / more than five fingers on each hand.
3. ***Almost all*** humans have exactly five fingers / more than five fingers on each hand

Grammatical Constructions

How do we determine the truth of these statements?

4. The Minister asked the police to stop stealing on 22nd Sept 2026
5. Aman came home at 4:32pm on 22nd Sept 2026.
6. Aman was coming home at 4:32pm on 22nd Sept 2026
7. Aman re-arranged the furniture /arranged the furniture again.

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Opportunities and Challenges

What opportunities do LLMs present for the stakeholders of education?

What challenges do LLMs pose for the stakeholders of education?

[stakeholders: students, faculty, education administrators, policy makers]

Opportunities and Challenges

It would be counterproductive to set up policies to prevent students from using LLMs (policing), even for specific purposes.

What educational institutions that aspire to move from pre-modern to modern education should do: ***empower students to do what current LLMs cannot do.***

Comments?

A Five-Year Plan

What is your response to the following Five-Year plan?

1. Select/identify faculty with the potential to function in HOCC, and take them through faculty development programs to help them (a) acquire trans-disciplinary HOCC, and (b) help their students acquire trans-disciplinary HOCC.
2. Set up a foundation program for the first two years of Bharat Vidya, with courses on reasoning and logic, epistemic semantics, inquiry and critical thinking, critical reading, trans-disciplinary thinking, and Indian Knowledge Systems.

A Five-Year Plan

3. Implement computer-gradable Enhanced-MCQs that probe into HOCC.
4. Conduct field trials of (2) and (3) and fine-tune them.
5. Convert as many courses of (2) as possible into online courses, such that students in other universities can also learn from them.
6. Revise the curricula for specialisations such that they aim at HOCC, going beyond the understanding of content knowledge.

7. General Q & A

Thank You!