**Lecture One: Nature of Language**

**1. A General Overview on Linguistic Studies**

Linguistics is generally defined as *the scientific study of language*. The latter has been a subject to many studies and researches from the very ancient times to this era. A general overview on the development of linguistic studies reveals that the study of language is not a new discipline though in the very beginnings, language study was merely restricted to certain types of texts like in ancient India (religious texts), ancient Greece and Rome (traditional grammar based on the study of Greek and Latin), Arabic studies (Arabic grammar based on classical Arabic which is the language of Quran). Language studies continued during the middle ages with the study of new scripts in addition to grammar and rhetoric. Afterwards, linguistics developed and took new directions which led to the emergence of various branches and schools:

* Historical Linguistics
* Structuralism
* Descriptive linguistics
* Prague Functionalism
* Linguistics after 1950s
* Contemporary linguistics

**2. Definition of Language**

Scholars and linguists provided many definitions to language. The following are some of them:

* In *Course in general linguistics,* De Saussure says, “language is a system of signs that express ideas” (p.16).
* “Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These symbols are, in the first instance, auditory and they are produced by the so-called ʻorgans of speech’ ” (Sapir, 1921, p.7).
* Bloomfield (1926) states that “the totality of the utterances that can be made in a speech community is the language of that speech community” (p.155).
* According to Bloch and Trager (1942), “a language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates” (as cited in Lyons, 1981, p.4).
* Chomsky (2002) defines language as: “a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements” (p.13).
* According to *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (4th edition),* language is“the system of human communication which consists of the structured arrangement of sounds (or their written representation) into larger units, e.g. morphemes, words, sentences, utterances” (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p.311). Moreover, “In common usage it can also refer to non-human systems of communication such as the ʻlanguage’ of bees, the ʻlanguage’ of dolphins” ( Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p.311).

All these definitions give us an overview about the nature and characteristics of language.

**References**

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