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Q4(b)

Mention the major branches of linguistic anthropology and discuss language use in social and cultural settings

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Linguistic Anthropology.

(d) Linguistic Anthropology.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the major branches of linguistic anthropology. How is language used in social and cultural settings?
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

Revision summary

Branches cover structure, historical reconstruction, ethnolinguistics, and sociolinguistics.

Hymes asked for an ethnography of speaking, not only a grammar.

Labov showed class and style in variation.

In settings, language does kinship, ritual, and rank.

Code-switching and ideology show language as a social resource.

Introduction

Linguistic anthropology studies language as a social practice. Its branches split structure, history, and use. Use is never only grammar in the head.

Body

Major branches

- **Descriptive and structural linguistics** record phonology, morphology, and syntax. **Boas**, **Sapir**, and **Bloomfield** made this the first professional kit.
- **Historical linguistics** reconstructs families and contact. It is the time depth of words, as in Indo-Aryan and Dravidian in India.
- **Ethnolinguistics and the Sapir-Whorf problem** ask how categories of grammar relate to thought and culture. Strong determinism is rejected; influence is still researched.
- **Sociolinguistics**, after **Labov**, maps class, gender, and style in variation. **Dell Hymes'** ethnography of speaking asks who may speak, in which code, to whom.
- **Pragmatics, discourse, and linguistic ideology** study speech acts, narrative, and beliefs about language, including Sanskrit prestige or colonial English.

Language in social and cultural settings

- Kinship terms, honorifics, and taboo words do social structure. A Trobriand or Nuer address term is a political act.
- Ritual speech, oratory, and silence organise **authority**. A chief's speech and a woman's lament are different settings.

- Code-switching in Indian bazaars and courts shows class and identity. Language is a resource, not a mirror of a frozen tribe.
- **Geertz's** thick description of a **Java** slametan or a Balinese fight needs the local words; meaning lives in use.

Flow diagram

Linguistic anthropology -> Structure history
Linguistic anthropology -> Sociolinguistics Hymes
Sociolinguistics Hymes -> Honorific ritual code-switch
Honorific ritual code-switch -> Identity authority

Conclusion

The branches run from structure and history to speaking in society. Language in setting is how people do kinship, rank, ritual, and identity.

Facts & figures

Sapir

Boasian linguist who tied language, culture, and personality without crude race.

Hymes

SPEAKING model: setting, participants, ends, act, key, instrumentalities, norms, genre.

Labov

New York department-store study made social class audible in pronunciation.

Whorf

Hopi time arguments founded the linguistic-relativity debate later trimmed by evidence.

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