

Applied Linguistics.
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Lecture -25.
Disability and Learning Disorder.

In this module on disability and learning disorder, we are going to be looking at one of the most challenging areas in applied linguistics. The types of disabilities and learning disorders that we are going to be talking about and where attention to language is significant are not easy to come up with. These are at times not really disabilities and at times they simply require sensitivity. The harder part is to make the distinction between what counts as disability and what does not.

We apply our understanding of language and the study of language from the various domains of the study of language to solve real-life issues in applied linguistics. In society, we have seen several domains where findings from various domains of the study of language are useful and helpful and they become part of applied linguistics. This is one such critical domain.

So, we are going to look at it very briefly today and then finally we will be dealing with several scholars who have done their research in this field and we will be inviting them to talk about some of these difficulties in this field on their own. So, for several modules we are going to be looking at the questions of disability and learning difficulties in terms of learning disorders.

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A few questions -

- How is language processed in the brain?
- Do human beings process language in the same way that animals do?
- Do we learn language or is there an inbuilt system in us that helps us acquire it with ease?

Assumption:

We first talk about norm or normal and keep reinforcing it. In reality this does not exist. And then label those who do not come close to that profile as 'disabled'.



The 1st want to ask a very few basic questions like how is language processed in human brain? Do human beings process language in the same way that animals do, that nonhumans do? And do we learn language or is there an inbuilt system in us that helps us acquire it with ease, with total comfort without any effort? In some details we have looked at some of these questions, at the same time I invite you to take a look at some of these questions on your own and find answers.

And answers to these questions and understanding that you have developed in this course so far about language are going to be helpful in understanding language difficulties, disabilities and learning disorders to a greater extent. And it also helps us understand the sensitivity required in this domain. The entire domain of disability works with the fundamental assumption and I want you to evaluate this assumption whether it makes sense or not.

We 1st talk about Norm or normal people and we keep reinforcing that, whereas we know that such parameters that define normals do not exist. And then label those who do not come close to that profile as disabled. This is the fundamental distinction between normal and disabled in our society. And the society assumes that normal is paradigm, Normal is general part of society, whereas disabilities are problems and it requires special care. Of course they do, they require special care but this assumption becomes difficult to hold and it does not let us think beyond a particular point. We are going to be looking at this aspect as well in our discussions on disability.

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- When a person is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently, or has problems with his or her voice, then he or she has a **speech disorder**.
- Difficulties pronouncing sounds, or articulation disorders, and stuttering are examples of speech disorders.
- When a person has trouble understanding (**reception**) others or sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings completely (**expression**), then he or she has a **language disorder**.
- Both children and adults can have speech and language disorders. They can occur as a result of a medical problem or have no known cause.



So, what is disability and what are the different types of disability that we want to talk about? So, when a person is unable to produce a speech sound correctly or fluently or has problems with voice, then that is, that type of disability is called speech disorder. Difficulties in pronouncing sounds for articulation disorders and stuttering are examples of speech disorders as well.


So, on the other hand when the person has trouble understanding others and sharing thoughts, ideas, feelings completely, then these types of people have language disorders. So, we are trying to make a distinct and between speech disorder and language disorder because both require different types of attention. So, both, children and adults can have speech and language disorders and they can occur as a result of a medical problem or they can also occur for the reasons that we do not know.

However they do occur and when we talk about language, the entire issue of language and disability, these are the 2 broader areas in which we find the kinds of difficulties that we are discussing about and they are, these difficulties or these disorders and language difficulties or language disorders. And language disorder is going to be of 2 types, one is in reception and the other is in expressing, that is one in understanding and the other is in production.

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Adult Speech and Language Disorders

- Adults may experience speech and language difficulties for a variety of reasons.
 - Speech Disorders
 - Apraxia
 - Dysarthria
 - Stuttering Voice
 - Language Disorders
 - Aphasia



To take some example of adult speech and language disorder, so when adults experience speech and language difficulties, there are various types like apraxia , stuttering of voices and dysarthria, some of these are speech disorder type of difficulties, whereas aphasia is one example of language disorder.

Some of the medical conditions that may cause speech disorder and language disorder could be Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, dementia, Huntington's disease, laryngeal cancer, oral cancer, right hemisphere brain injury, brain injury becomes one of the very critical part in language and speech disorder, this requires a specific attention by itself, it has been studied at length too, stroke, traumatic brain injury is yet another medical condition in which we find language disorders.

So, these are well-known medical conditions which may cause language difficulties, however as we mentioned before, language difficulties and speech disorders may be caused by certain reasons that we do not know of. Once again, we want to look at certain contexts in which we talk about disability or we are not that careful about disability.

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Context

- Disability is generally seen as a medical issue.
- We live in a world that has been created for the so-called 'normal' person.
- Children with special needs or disabilities can often function as 'normally' as any other person.
 - For example, there is no reason why children with visual, hearing or orthopaedic impairment should not excel as much in their work as any other child.
 - It is just that we are NOT sensitive to create an environment which is accessible to these children and where we have systems in place that would take care of their needs.



So the idea about disability is generally seen as a medical issue, however that may not be true all the time. It definitely is medical issue but we live in a world that has been created for normal people and this is what we were discussing earlier in the our assumptions about disability studies that the world has ordered for normal people and anything that does not conform to that order is called disabled. However, that is hard to categorise in the following sense that children with certain special kinds of needs disabilities can often function as normally as any other person and this has been seen in great details at length.


So, for example, there is no reason why children with visual, hearing and orthopaedic impairment should not excel as much in their work as any other child. These kinds of difficulties of visual impairment or hearing impairment or orthopaedic impairment requires

only little bit of assistance in dealing with difficulties that really causes problems in education. It is just that we are not sensitive to create an environment which is accessible to these children and where we have system in place that would take care of their needs.

We are not sensitive about that, therefore the difficulties, whether it is about language or other kinds of learning in the domain of education for the people with visual impairments, hearing impairments and orthopaedic impairments gets multiplied and have very little and careful attention and sensitivity to these issues and very little physical help is going to make things very normal and their performance as comparable as a performance of any other child in the society.

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- There are always limited resources for children with physical and mental disabilities in everyday life and within the classroom.
- We do NOT have to make the present environment 'inclusive'. Rather, we need to create an environment that is by definition 'inclusive' of all.
- It is not unimaginable to construct our physical and social space in which the visually, hearing, orthopedic and other persons with disability will constitute the normative.



The current normative can eminently function in that environment anyway.

There are always limited resources for children with physical and mental disabilities in everyday life and within the classroom as well. Most of the classrooms are not disabled friendly and in this particular point, we are particularly talking about the large number of government schools for elementary education.

The condition of government schools in elementary education is a big domain which requires all kinds of attention for them to be functioning properly. Therefore we dropped this point right here and move to another one and with the point that classrooms need to be accommodated and friendly with the people with any kind of disability. We do not have to make the present environment inclusive, rather we need to create an environment that is by definition inclusive for all.

Now, again this is a point which can be comparable with developing an understanding about language. I want you to reflect back on the idea of language. We have been pressing the point so far that people are not monolingual, societies do not speak just one language and language by definition is multilingual in nature. So, that so much so that and this understanding that we developed from the point that what we speak is a variety of some language. That variety may have its own name or may not have any for that matter.

And that variety within may have several varieties, therefore the capacity to negotiate with several varieties and the language that it is a variety of together make a continuum and then we understand the entire continuum of that language as multilinguality. And individuals fall at one place or the other and they have the performance, the competence in dealing with, in negotiating with several varieties at a time in various domains of language use.

Similarly, this is a comprehensive understanding of language, how it can be defined as multilinguality. Similarly the issue of disability needs to be understood with care. And there is some common ground between the 2. The requirements for disability and the care that people with disability need, children with disability require in classes do not have to be created additionally.

To begin with, the facilities have to be created in such a way that it accounts for disability, it becomes friendly for people with disability and then it becomes inclusive for all anyway because people with no disability are assumably no disability will become part of that anyway. So, then, it does not require anything additional, it simply requires the creation of facility begin with in such a way that every it is inclusive for everybody.

It is not unimaginable, it is possible, it is possible to consider our physical and social space in such a way that the visually, hearing and orthopaedic and other persons with different kinds of disability will constitute the normative in such a physical and social space. The current normative can eminently function in that environment anyway as we have just discussed that if the facility is created, which is friendly for people with disability, it is going to be functional for people without difficulties anywhere.

Just take an example, this is intuitive, this does not need arguments, if we are creating doors for accessing a room where wheelchairs can easily enter, if all the doors are in such a way where wheelchairs can enter, people without wheelchairs can enter that door anyway, it does not require much of a discussion.

Therefore this does not require special creation, this does not require space created specifically for people with disability. This is the least that can be done to take care of the issues that we deal with a number daily life and more often than not becomes very difficult to handle for people with any kind of difficulties including the 3 that we have been discussing so far.

We need to look at the question of disability at another level as well which is social in nature, linguistic and its function and psychological in perspective. We need to account for this in terms of at least we need to be aware of this. We do not have a prescription here to do, for example to do what with this with such a thing, however an understanding of this and this type of social construct in our lives is at least going to make us sensitive enough towards this questions.

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Encoding disability in language

- Proverbs and idioms in different languages are centered around persons with disabilities.
 - *andhon men kana raja*
'a one-eyed man is a king among the blind'.
- In academic contexts this suggests that a person with minimal literacy skills would function like a kind among the illiterates; the proverb thus metaphorically equates disability with academic inferiority.



Let us take an example, proverbs and idioms in different languages are created around persons with disabilities, to take that one example from Hindi “Andho mein kaana raja.” It means a one eyed man is a king among the blinds. So, Andha and Kaana, these are the terms used in Hindi around people with some sort of disability, that is visual impairment, it is total impairment or partial impairment.

The problem becomes multiplied when it becomes part of academic discourse. In academic context, this suggests that a person with minimal literacy skills with function like a king among illiterates. The probe up does metaphorically equates disability with academic

inferiority. This is a problem at the levels that we discussed it, it is linguistically encoded, it is a social issue and it has psychological perspective on it.


Such types of proverbs are in abundance in namely in Hindi and in all languages that are spoken around. I invite you to think about this in the languages you are proficient with. Take a moment, think about the proverbs which are encoded and which are created with linguistic encoding and the terms referring to disabilities are used to create one. It is a linguistic encoding is also seen around gender insensitivity and whatnot.

Issues like the sayings like in Hindi, if we take an example from Hindi, a saying like “Ladkiyo ki tarah rona.” The use of girls, that is femininity with making it of a type and making that as part of academic discourse or use of that in several domains of language used in social context requires similar kind of attention. But we do see a role of our social setup where we have disability encoded in language. This again requires specific discussion at length on its own till the question is what are the things that can be done to take care of these issues.

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Encouragements

- Teachers and educators can do at their level to bring about a change in these numbers of literacy and employment of the disabled population.
 - changes in the school building by building ramps, write room numbers in brail as well, make accommodations within the classroom by giving enough space, adding railings and handrails, disabled friendly;
 - some staff for the assistance of students with disabilities;
 - disabled students in dance, music and sports activities such as wheel chair marathon, assisted swimming or volleyball;
 - Focus on the abilities of the individual child and support him/her: It is easy to focus on what a child cannot do because of a physical disability, however, it is really important to focus on what the child can do.



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The teachers and educators in the domain of education have huge responsibility. They can do a lot at their levels to bring huge changes and that is going to enhance the potential for literacy and employment and empowerment of the disabled population. There are constitutional provisions for disabled population, the number is huge given, Indian statistics but minimal change in attitude in society at infrastructure and accommodation in education are going to bring big changes in the manner and the way they are perceived in these

domains. Certain things like certain changes school buildings in form of ramps and rooms, script in Braille, markings in Braille and giving enough space to people with disabilities is going to develop encouragement and fulfilment.

Certain staff could be devoted to take care of people with disabilities for assistance and that is also going to make a huge difference. Schools and teachers and educators can try to include students with disabilities in dance competitions, music competitions, sports activities, and there are lots of sports activities available for them.

It could be associated with assisted Swimming or volleyball, now the point is not that they do not exist in real-world, there are a lot of people who are already very sensitive to these things, a lot of schools are taking care of them but we are talking about sensitivity towards these things at larger scale. A focus on the abilities of the individual, the child in terms of providing support to him is also required in order to encourage students with difficulties and disabilities.

It is very easy for us to focus on what a child cannot do because of certain type of disabilities. And it is equally difficult and at the same time important to focus on what the child can do. That is what the child with difficulty and disability can do. So, if the focus is shifted on what the child can do, trust me, we understand this is hard, but this is going to bring about revolutionary changes in the way disability is perceived.

And at this point we are only talking about certain types of disabilities which are in particular physical disabilities. Now, we want to talk about some of the issues that we have seen, some of the types of disorders that come in discussion when we talk about learning difficulties and learning disorders. They are 2 categories, some of them are speech disorders and some of them are language disorder, we are going to talk about some for example for us to understand them at length and then I also invite you to think about these things with sensitivity and see if these, the questions that these discussions are raising make sense.

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- **Dyslexia:**

Dyslexia is a neurological disorder that affects both boys and girls equally. In most cases it's a genetic disorder. Dyslexia is one of the most common cognitive disorders that affect language. Specifically, this disorder affects reading capabilities like recognizing words properly and spelling which may lead to problems in fluency in reading, a slow vocabulary growth, writing and comprehension issues.



Dyslexia is one very common term that comes up when we talk about learning difficulties. It is a neurological disorder and it affects all types of children in terms of both boys and girls. It is also considered as a genetic disorder and it is one of the most common cognitive disorders that affect language. This disorder affects reading capabilities, in recognising words properly and spellings which may lead to problems in fluency in reading, slow vocabulary growth, writing and comprehension issues.

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- **Auditory Processing Disorder (APD):**


APD is a condition that affects how sound is processed in the brain. People who have APD cannot distinguish small differences in different sounds or the order in which the sounds were produced. People with this disorder do not have auditory problems. Their hearing is fine. The main problem is in processing of those sounds in the brain. Once again, ALL human beings may show evidence of such behaviour.



At the same time we see something like APD auditory processing disorder and it is a condition that affects how sound is processed in the brain. It is not hearing disorder, people

with APD have hard time distinguishing small differences in different sounds or the order in which the sounds were produced. The hearing for the people with this disorder is fine, the main problem is in processing of those sounds in the brain. Many humans may have, may show evidence of such behaviour, but this requires a proper diagnosis.

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- **Learning Processing Disorder (LPD):** LPD is a disorder that affects the ability of a person to associate meaning to a sound/word. This is a type of Auditory processing disorder.
 - **Visual Motor Deficit (VMD):** People with this disorder have a problem in processing visual signs or letters. This disorder also affects a person's ability to imitate what they see in terms of writing or drawing. People with VMD often have problems in holding pens/ pencil/ colours tightly, have problems in cutting and generally have poor hand-eye coordination.
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Learning processing disorder is something that affects the ability of a person to associate meaning to sound or meaning to words and visual motor deficit is the type of difficulty which creates a problem in processing visual signs or letters. This disorder also affects person's ability to imitate what they see in terms of writing or drawing. People with visual motor deficit often have problems in holding pens, pencils, colors and have problems in cutting and generally have poor hand-eye coordination.

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- **Dysgraphia:** A disorder that affects a person's fine motor skills and the ability to write well. People with this disorder have an unreadable handwriting, may not write on the line, may not give proper spacing between words.



Dysgraphia is a disorder that affects a person's motor skills and the ability to write properly, in other words write well. People with bad handwriting are usually termed as disgraphic, however again it requires attention. And we are going to see discussions later where some experts challenge these things on the basis of evidence from their research.

That we need to see to develop our understanding how at this point we are nearly introducing these terms. So, people with this disorder, with this type of disorder may not be able to write everything under a line or on the line. And this may not give proper spacing between words, so very jumbled presentation of writing is symptomatic of this disorder.

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- **Dyspraxia:** Dyspraxia is a disorder that affects fine motor skills like being able to comb their hair, use their mouth muscles to speak well. They bump into things a lot and have a hard time holding things in a tight grip. Most children have a problem with strength and coordination. This disorder can overall affect the child's learning and speaking capabilities in a classroom setting if the disorder has not been diagnosed.



Yet another type of disorder is dyspraxia which is also a motor skill disorder and people with this type of disorder will have difficulty in combing their hair, use their mouth muscles to speak. They bump into things a lot and have hard time holding things with a tight grip. Most people have a problem with strength and coordination with those who are diagnosed with disabilities with this difficulty. This disorder can overall affect learning and speaking capabilities in classroom settings if the disorder has not been diagnosed properly.

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- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):**
This disorder makes it hard for children to focus and is associated with hyperactivity. People who suffer from this disorder have a hard time paying attention or sitting still. People who have ADHD have a very difficult time focusing at their assignments, might not finish tasks, might move from one task to another without completing any, may be distracted and distract others, may have a hard time organizing their tasks and might not be able to follow instructions very well. Many children who have ADHD also have other learning disabilities. Learning is very challenging for children with ADHD.




These are some of the names we need to read more about these things, the symptoms, their the kinds of attention they require and what other types of difficulties they create together. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is yet another one which is commonly known as ADHD and this disorder makes it much harder for children to focus and this is associated with hyperactivity.

People who suffer from this type of disorder have hard time paying attention or sitting in one place. People who have ADHD have very difficult time in focusing at the assignments, might not finish tasks, might move from one task to another, maybe distracted and distract others, may have hard time organising the tasks and might not be able to follow instructions very well. Many children who have ADHD, that is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have other learning disabilities too. Learning is very challenging for children with ADHD.

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Some of the important ways in which teachers can help children with learning disorders:

- Work with their strengths.
- Help build their confidence
- Use a combination of teaching methods to encourage learning such as visual aids, listening, writing, movement, senses etc.
- **Use flexible homework modes like instead of writing, they can underline the answer or use multiple choice or matching or let them give their homework orally.**
- **Repeat directions and use step by step directions**
- Let them record the lesson instead of taking notes
- Give them extra time both in and outside the class
- Create alternative assignments based on their needs



If you look at the entire process of learning that we have been discussing, it becomes challenging any way and that is a huge discussion about learning in cognitive science which we will discuss in one of the modules. At learning of language and then a combination of these disorders are going to make the learning process very challenging and they require certain attention, certain diagnosis and help as well. Those attentions in certain ways, a lot of these disorders can be helped with. So, focus on the strengths of children and employing several ways in building confidence is going to be helpful for people with these disorders.

The use of combination of teaching methods to encourage learning, learning for people with visual aids, listening, writing and movement, senses etc. is also going to be very encouraging. Using flexible homework modes, instead of writing, they can underline an answer or use multiple-choice matching or let them give their homework or release is also going to be very helpful.

And if these things are implemented, the performance is going to be multiplied. Repeated dictations or directions, use of step-by-step directions are also helpful at times. When we allow them to record lessons instead of taking notes is has been seen is very helpful method. Giving the extra time both in outside and inside the class have also been helpful. And to create alternative assignments based on their needs is also going to be helpful. So, there a lot of ways in which people with language difficulties and disabilities can be helped and can be accommodated as well. Thank you.