

Department of Linguistics, University of Mumbai

Winter School in Introduction to Scientific Theory Construction through Language Structure

Resource persons: K P Mohanan and Tara Mohanan
Dates: 11th – 20th of November, 2019
Timings: 9:30 am to 5.30 pm
Venue: Dept. of Linguistics, University of Mumbai

Concept note by the Resource Persons

The aim of the workshop is to introduce participants to the art and craft of constructing scientific theories. For this, we will use language structure as the terrain for practice.

We may think of a theory as a set of *propositions* which have a set of *logical consequences* called *predictions*. If the predictions match the *observational generalizations* we arrive at from *observational reports* through *inductive reasoning*, we say that the theory *explains* the generalizations. If the theory that we are considering is the best available theory — based on the criteria for evaluation of (i) correctness of predictions, (ii) absence of internal logical contradictions, (iii) scope (or generality), and (iv) parsimony (or simplicity) — then we judge the theory to be tentatively true.

Using examples from phonology, morphology, syntax, and grammatical semantics, we will introduce the tools of scientific theory construction. The learning outcome we aim at is the ability to engage in scientific inquiry. The understanding of language structure and of textbook linguistic theories would be pleasing side products. However, the activities in the workshop would feed into the ability to construct linguistic theories, as a special case of scientific theories.

This workshop is also open to those who already have degrees in linguistics or are currently enrolled in linguistics programs. They must, however, be warned that their prior background may result in a certain degree of anguish, for the following reasons. We are not going to discuss substantive or formal frameworks for the formulation of linguistic theories. Nor would we be concerned with differences in formal notation that are often taken to be differences in theory. Someone who expects discussion of the ‘latest’ fashions in linguistics (which they can use in their papers or dissertations/theses) would be disappointed.

Once participants understand the substantive aspects of the evolution of theoretical linguistics over the last seven decades, they will be in a much better position to acquire facility with the use of the latest frameworks, and the capacity to translate from one framework to another.

The workshop does not presuppose prior background in what is covered in undergraduate or graduate programs in linguistics. But we do expect reasoning capacity, clarity and precision in thinking and communication, and fluency in English.

Those who are curious about this approach to linguistics education may take a look at our unfinished ‘textbook’ *Exploring Patterns of Language Structure* at <https://sites.google.com/site/eplsmohanans/>. They may also like to take a look at the approach to education that we are committed to as members of ThinQ, by browsing through the ThinQ website www.thinq.education

-K P Mohanan and Tara Mohanan

Who can apply

- Students pursuing M.Phil / Ph.D. in Linguistics
- Young faculty in Linguistics or Languages
- MA second year students in Linguistics
- Anyone with a research interest in language structures

How to apply

Interested candidates must submit, in PDF format:

- (a) a write up describing why you wish to pursue scientific theory construction; and what interests you in language structure; and
- (b) a one-page bio-data

by e-mail to mumbailinguistics@gmail.com before 15th of August, 2019.

Selected candidates will be intimated by 22nd of August, 2019. The list of selected candidates will be posted on our website: www.mumbailinguisticcircle.com

Fee structure

Faculty, independent research scholars and students from outside India: Rs. 8000/-

M.Phil/ Ph.D. students with scholarship: Rs. 5000/-

Students without scholarship: Rs. 3500/-

(The fee includes breakfast and working lunch.)

Those who need accommodation at the University campus: an additional Rs. 4000/-

Note: We do not want any individual to miss out on the Winter School due to financial constraints. Candidates interested in the Winter School but unable to afford the fee, may contact us for concession.

Bio-note on the Resource Persons

K P Mohanan, MS, PhD Linguistics, MIT, Cambridge, USA

Mohanan, Co-Founder of ThinQ, is an internationally well-known theoretical linguist, with a passion for education, and a deep interest in bases for beliefs across disciplines. After a PhD from MIT in 1982, he taught at the University of Texas at Austin, MIT, Stanford University, and the National University of Singapore, before joining the IISER-Pune Faculty in January 2011, where he continued his work till he retired at the end of 2016. He has made significant contributions to linguistic theory in the areas of phonology, syntax, and morphology. Along with Tara Mohanan, he was the architect of an Inquiry-Oriented undergraduate program in Linguistics at NUS. His more recent academic interests include scientific inquiry and the nature of academic knowledge and inquiry in general, against the backdrop of human beliefs. Drawing on his experience as a researcher and educationist, and his thinking on academic knowledge and inquiry, he is currently preoccupied with developing systems and resource materials to nurture in students the capacity for critical thinking and inquiry.

Tara Mohanan, PhD Linguistics, Stanford University, USA

Tara, Co-Founder of ThinQ, is well respected internationally for her work on theoretical issues in semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology, based largely but not exclusively on phenomena in Hindi and Malayalam. After receiving an MLitt from CIEFL, Hyderabad (now EFLU), and a PhD in theoretical linguistics from Stanford University, USA, she taught for 16 years at the National University of Singapore, where she co-designed with K P Mohanan an Inquiry-Oriented undergraduate program in Linguistics. She also designed the curriculum for the Language program in the Department of English Language and Literature. She resigned from NUS and returned to India in 2006 for personal reasons, and her academic work since then has been as a free-lancer. Her current preoccupation in academia is to design and develop a program to introduce students to rational inquiry across disciplines, while cultivating a joy of learning and the delight of discovery. She has a rare range in educational experience that spans experimenting with Inquiry-Oriented activities in 2nd Grade to advising PhD scholars writing a doctoral dissertation.