

Key points in this unit

1 About LANGUAGE

- ◆ The definition of Language
- ◆ Design Features of Language
- ◆ Functions of Language

2 About LINGUISTICS

- ◆ Main branches of linguistics
- ◆ Important distinctions in linguistics



Does the animal have language?

Linguistics

- Linguistics, simply, is the study of language.
Then,
- **What is language ?**
- **Is language human specific ?**
- **Do animals have language?**



The definition of Language

- ❖ Language is **purely human** and non-instinctive method of **communicating ideas, emotions and desires** by means of voluntarily produced symbols (Sapir, 1921).
- ❖ Language is a **system** of **arbitrary, vocal symbols** which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture to **communicate** or to interact (Finocchiaro, 1965).

The definition of Language

- ❖ Language is a **system** of **communication** by **sound**, operating through the organs of speech, among members of a given community, and using **vocal symbols** possessing **arbitrary conventional** meaning (Pei, 1966)

The definition of Language

- ◆ The generally accepted definition:
Language is a **system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication** (Wardhaugh, 1972).



□ Explanations

Firstly, language is a system, i.e., elements of language are combined according to rules. “iblk”, “Been he wounded has” are unacceptable.

Secondly, language is arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic connection between the word ‘pen’ and the thing we use to write with.



❖ Explanations

The fact that different languages have different words for the same object is a good illustration of the arbitrary nature of language.

This also explains the symbolic nature of language: words are just symbols; they are associated with objects, actions, ideas, etc, by convention. “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” .(Romeo and Juliet)

◆ Explanations

Thirdly, language is vocal because the primary medium is sound for all languages, no matter how well developed their writing systems are. All evidence points to the fact that writing systems came into being much later than the spoken forms and that they are only attempts to capture sounds and meaning on paper.

“children – spoken language – read and write”

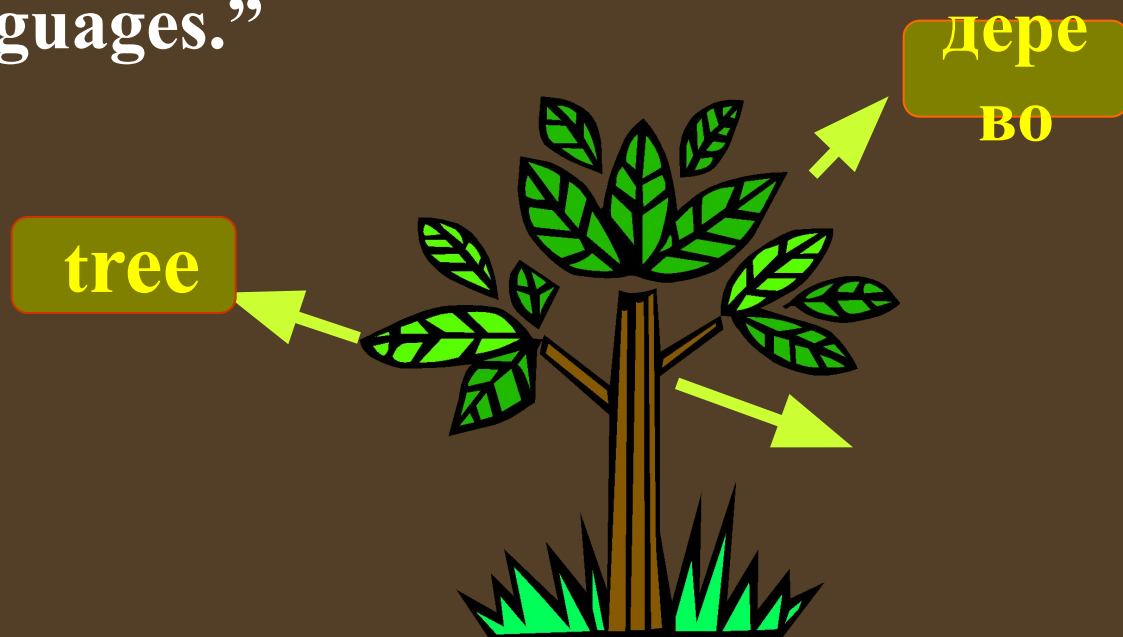
Design Features of Language

Design Features of Language refer to the quintessential characteristics of human language, which can distinguish any human language system from any non-human language system. They cover: **Arbitrariness, Duality, Creativity, Displacement,** and **Cultural transmission.**

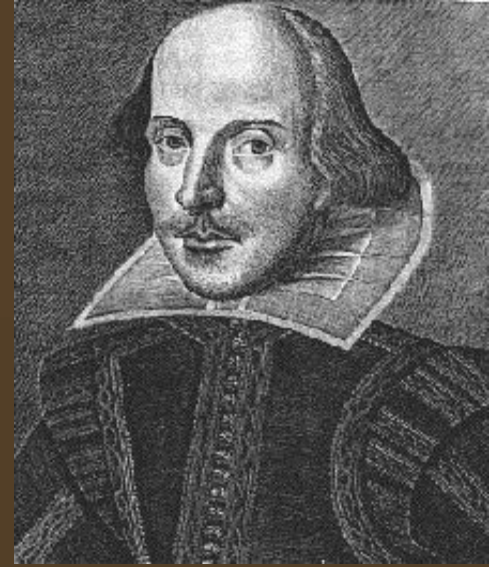
Design Features of Language

Arbitrariness

- ☞ This feature was first proposed by Saussure.
- ☞ The forms of linguistic signs bear no **natural** (**logical, intrinsic**) relationship to **their meaning**.
- ☞ “Different sounds are used to refer to the same object in different languages.”



Arbitrariness



- **At lexical level:**
- **A rose by any other name would smell as sweet (Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, 1594)**



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Arbitrariness

- **at the syntactic level**
- language is not arbitrary at the syntactic level.
- *(a) He came in and sat down.*
- *(b) He sat down and came in.*
- *(c) He sat down after he came in.*

Design Features of Language

Duality

Language possess the property of having two levels of structures:

Sounds (lower or basic level)

Meaning (higher level)

Sounds are combined with one another to form meaningful units such as words. The secondary units sounds are meaningless and the primary units have distinct and identifiable meaning.

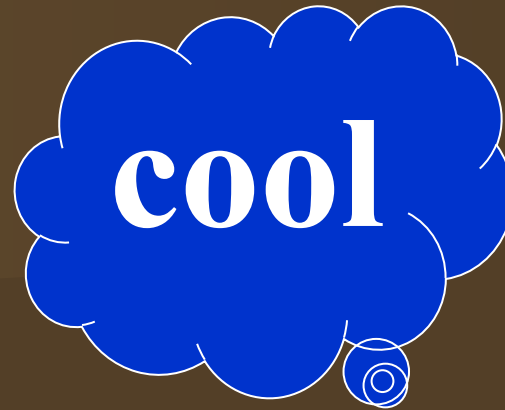
Design Features of Language

Creativity

- ◆ Language can be used to send messages we have never said or heard before.
- ◆ Creativity is unique to human language.
- ◆ Language is creative in that it makes possible the construction and interpretation of new signals by its users.



Creativity



- Words can be used in new ways to mean new things, and can be instantly understood by people who have never come across that usage before.



Creativity

- Language is resourceful because of its **duality** and its **recursiveness**.
- The recursive nature of language provides a potential to create an infinite number of /endless sentences.
- “Limited rules can produce unlimited sentences.” (Chomsky,1958).

Creativity

- **For instance:**
- This is the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.
- *He bought a book **which** was written by a teacher **who** taught in a school **which** was known for its graduates **who** ...*

Design Features of Language

Creativity

- Users can understand and produce words or sentences they have never heard before. Every day we send messages that have never been sent before and understand novel messages.
- Much of what we say and hear for the first time; yet there seems no problem of understanding.

Design Features of Language

Displacement

- Human languages enable their users to symbolize objects, events and concepts which are not present (in time and space) at the moment of communication.



- Thus, we can refer to Confucius, or the North Pole, even though the first has been dead for over 2550 years and the second is situated far away from us.

Displacement

- Animal communication is normally under “immediate stimulus control”.
- For instance, a warning cry of a bird instantly announces danger.



**My master
will be home
in a few days.**

**The honeybee's dance
exhibits displacement
a little bit: he can
refer to a source of
food, which is remote
in time and space
when he reports on it.**



Displacement

- **Human language is stimulus-free. What we are talking about need not be triggered by any external stimulus in the world or any internal state.**
- **Our language enables us to communicate about things that do not exist or do not yet exist.**

Design Features of Language

Cultural transmission

- Animal call systems are *genetically* transmitted.
- Language is *culturally* transmitted. It is passed on from one generation to the next by teaching and learning, rather than by instinct.





Topics for discussion

- **No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his parents were poor but honest.**
- **Bertrand Russell**
- **A rose by other name would smell as sweet.**
– **Shakespeare**



*Do we have
language
?*

Questions

- What if there were no language?



- What function does language play in daily life?

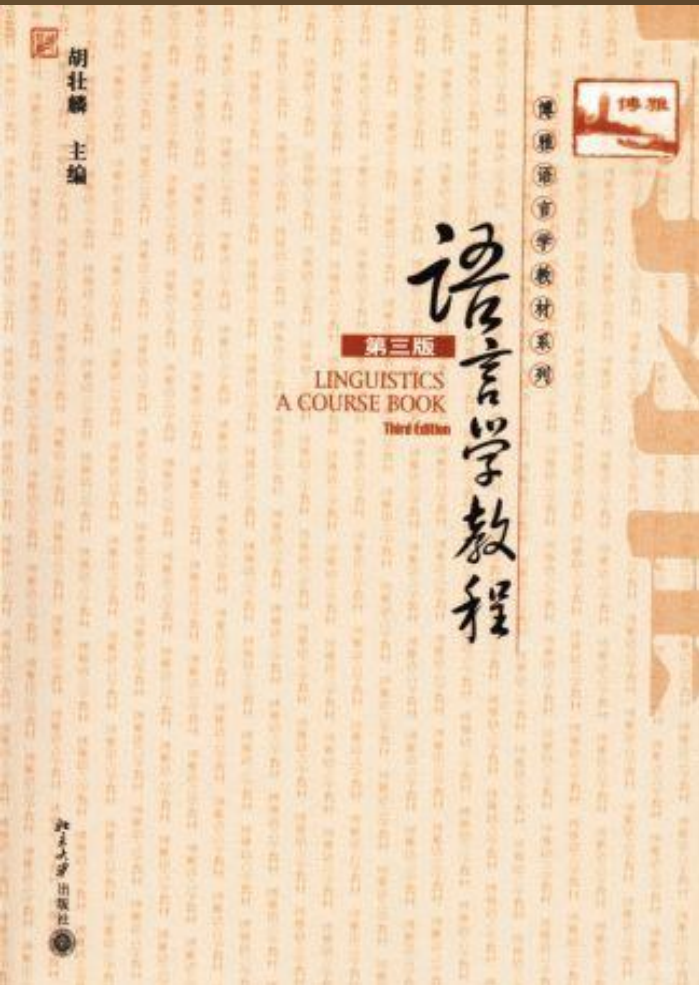
language functions

Metafunctions of Language proposed by Halliday



- ***Ideational*** function (a model of experience as well as logical relations);
- ***Interpersonal*** function (to establish and maintain social relationships);
- ***Textual*** function (to creates relevance to context).

language functions



- Informative
- Interpersonal
- Performative
- Emotive
- Phatic communion
- Recreational
- Metalingual

Functions of Language



■ Informative

- Language is used to convey messages, that is to inform somebody of some information.
- Declarative sentences are employed to realize the function.
- One of the features of this function is the proposition has the true or false value,
- e.g. Water boils at 90°C . Water boils at 100°C .

Functions of Language



■ Interpersonal

- By far the most important sociological use of language, and by which people establish and maintain their status in a society, “polite expressions, humble words”, expression of identity.
- For example, the ways in which people address others (*Dear Sir, Dear Professor, Johnny*), and refer to themselves (*yours, your obedient servant*) indicate the various grades of interpersonal relations.

Functions of Language

■ Interpersonal

- In the framework of **functional grammar**, it is concerned with interaction between the addresser and addressee in the discourse situation and the addresser's attitude toward what he speaks or writes about.

Functions of Language

Performative function

- This concept originates from the philosophical study of language represented by Austin and Searle, whose theory now forms the back-bone of pragmatics. For example,
 - I now declare the meeting open.
 - I bet you two pounds it will rain tomorrow.

Functions of Language

■ Performative function

It is to change the social status of persons, as in marriage ceremonies, the sentencing of criminals, the blessing of children, the naming of a ship at a launching ceremony, and the cursing of enemies. (formal and ritualized)



Functions of Language

■ **Emotive function**

to change the emotional status of an audience for or against someone or something: swear words, obscenities, involuntary verbal reactions to beautiful art or scenery; conventional words/phrases, (e.g., My God, Damn it, What a sight, Wow, Ugh, Ow...)

Functions of Language

■ **Phatic communion**

It refers to the social interaction of language.

Small, seemingly meaningless topic to maintain a comfortable relationship between people without involving any factual content, “health, weather”

Expressions that help define and maintain interpersonal relations, such as slangs, jokes, jargons, ritualistic exchanges, switches to social and regional dialects.

Phatic communion

- We all use such small, seemingly meaningless expressions to maintain a comfortable relationship between people without involving any factual content.
- *Good morning, God bless you, Nice day, hello*
- Greetings, farewells, and comments on the weather in English

Functions of Language

Recreational function

- To use language for the sheer joy of using it, such as a baby's babbling, a chanter's chanting, verbal dueling, poetry writing.

Functions of Language

Metalingual function

- Language can be used to talk about itself.
- metalanguage : certain kinds of linguistic signs or terms for the analysis and description of particular studies, e.g. approving, formal, non technical, old-fashioned; [u] , [c], etc.



■ Functions of Language

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Informative | Hello, do you know ...? I heard that ... | With language people can express themselves and communicate with others. |
| Inter-personal | Dear sir, Dear professor, John, yours, your obedient servant | By language people establish and maintain their social status in a society. |
| Performative | Marriage ceremonies, the sentence of a criminal, sui sui ping an (to break a bowl on Spring Festival) | People use language to change social status or control the reality on some special occasions |
| Emotive | Oh, my God! What a sight. And hurrah! | Language can be used to get rid of the nervous energy when we are under stress |
| Phatic | Good morning! Thank you. God bless you. | language is used to maintain a comfortable relationship between people without involving any factual content |
| Recreational | poetry writing gives people the pleasure of using language. | People use language for the sheer of joy. |
| Meta-lingual | book---- number of printed or written sheets of paper bound together in a cover. | People use language to talk about language itself. |

Linguistics

- Linguistics can be defined as **the scientific or systematic study of language**. It is a science in the sense that it scientifically studies the rules, systems and principles of human languages.

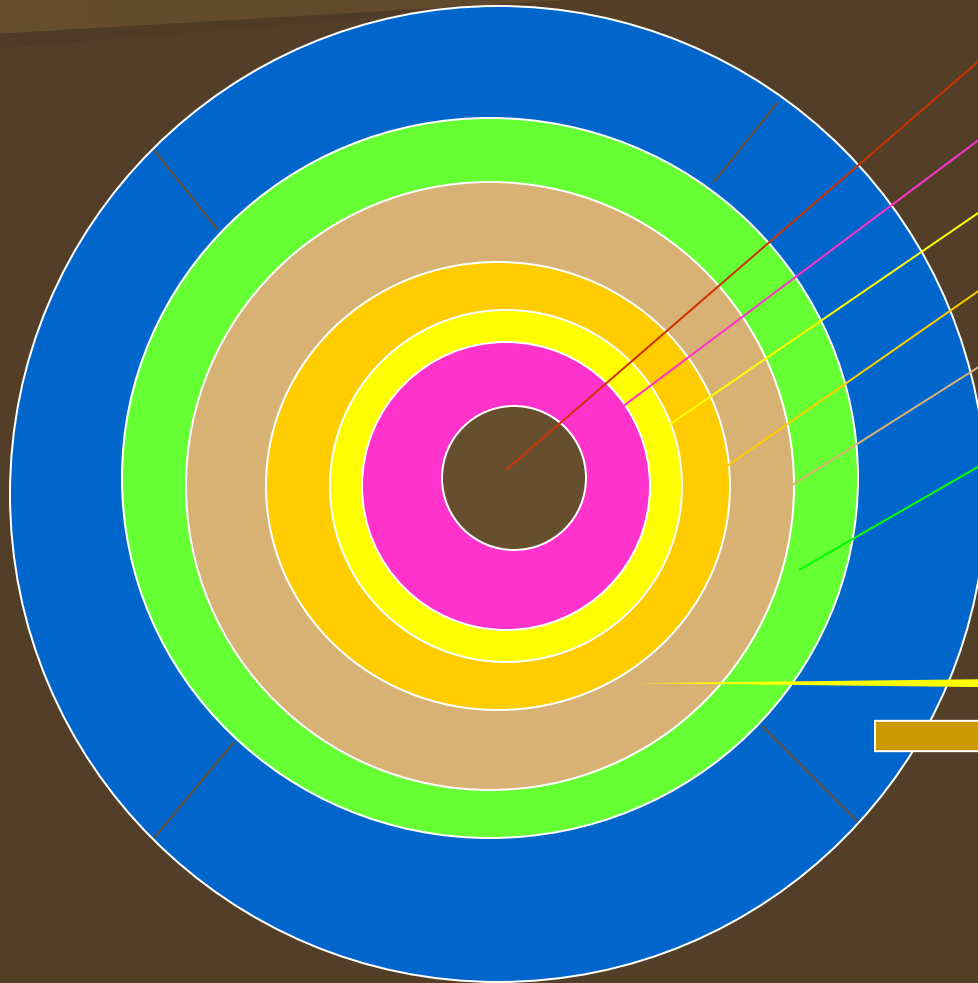


Linguistics has two main purposes

- One is that it studies the nature of language and tries to establish a theory of language and describes languages in the light of the theory established.
- The other is that it examines all the forms of language in general and seeks a scientific understanding of the ways in which it is organized to fulfill the needs it serves and the functions it performs in human life.

About LINGUISTICS

■ Main branches of linguistics



Phonetics

Phonology

Morphology

Syntax

Semantics

Pragmatics

Macrolinguistics

Psycholinguistics

Sociolinguistics

Anthropological

Computational

Scope of linguistics

- **Microlinguistics** includes phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics.
- **Macrolinguistics** includes sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, stylistics, discourse analysis, computational linguistics, cognitive linguistics, applied linguistics, etc.

Core branches of Linguistics

■ **Linguistics**



■ **Language**

■ **Sounds** **words** **sentences** **meaning**



Phonetics/phonology

morphology

syntax

semantics/pragmatics

Macrolinguistics

(Peripheral branches)

- **Psycholinguistics:**
Language + psychology
- **Sociolinguistics:**
Language + society
- **Anthropological linguistics:**
Language + anthropology
- **Computational linguistics:**
Language + computer

Microlinguistics

- **Phonetics** is the scientific study of speech sounds. It studies how speech sounds are articulated, transmitted, and received.
- **Phonology** is the study of how speech sounds function in a language, it studies the ways speech sounds are organized. It can be seen as the functional phonetics of a particular language.
- **Morphology** is the study of the formation of words. It is a branch of linguistics which breaks words into morphemes. It can be considered as the grammar of words as syntax is the grammar of sentences.

Microlinguistics

- **Syntax** deals with the combination of words into phrases, clauses and sentences. It is the grammar of sentence construction.
- **Semantics** is a branch of linguistics which is concerned with the study of meaning in all its formal aspects. Words have several types of meaning.
- **Pragmatics** can be defined as the study of language in use. It deals with how speakers use language in ways which cannot be predicted from linguistic knowledge alone, and how hearers arrive at the intended meaning of speakers. PRAGMATICS =MEANING-SEMANTICS.

Macrolinguistics

- **Sociolinguistics** studies the relations between language and society: how social factors influence the structure and use of language.
- **Psycholinguistics** is the study of language and mind: the mental structures and processes which are involved in the acquisition, comprehension and production of language.
- **Neurolinguistics** is the study of language processing and language representation in the brain. It typically studies the disturbances of language comprehension and production caused by the damage of certain areas of the brain.

Macrolinguistics

- **Stylistics** is the study of how literary effects can be related to linguistic features. It usually refers to the study of written language, including literary text, but it also investigates spoken language sometimes.
- **Discourse analysis**, or text linguistics, is the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which language is used. It deals with how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units.
- **Computational linguistics** is an approach to linguistics which employs mathematical techniques, often with the help of a computer.

Macrolinguistics

- **Cognitive linguistics** is an approach to the analysis of natural language that focuses on language as an instrument for organizing, processing, and conveying information.
- **Applied linguistics** is primarily concerned with the application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to the elucidation of language problems which have arisen in other areas of experience.

Important distinctions in linguistics

■ Descriptive vs. prescriptive

- If a linguistic study describes and analyzes the language people actually use, it is said to be descriptive; if it aims to lay down rules for “correct” behavior, i. e., to tell people what they should say and what they should not say, it is said to be prescriptive.

Descriptive vs. prescriptive

- **Don't say X.**

 - People don't say X.**

- **The first is a prescriptive command, while the second is a descriptive statement.**
- **The distinction lies in prescribing how things ought to be and describing how things are.**

Descriptive vs. prescriptive

- Most modern linguistics is descriptive. It attempts to describe what people actually say. Traditional grammars told people how to use a language.
- As traditional grammars tried to lay down rules, they are often called prescriptive.
- Descriptive grammars attempt to tell what is in the language, while prescriptive grammars tell people what should be in the language.
- Language changes and develops. The changes should be observed and described. This does not deny that languages have rules.

Important distinctions in linguistics

Synchronic vs. Diachronic

- Language can be studied at a given point in time or over time.
- When we study language at one particular time /at some point of time in history, it is called synchronic linguistics.
- When we study language developments through time, it is called diachronic or historical linguistics.
- Synchronic linguistics focuses on the state of language at any point in history while diachronic linguistics focuses on the differences in two or more than two states of language over decades or centuries.

Important distinctions in linguistics

Competence vs. Performance

- Proposed by American linguist N. Chomsky in the late 1950's.
- **Competence:** the ideal user's knowledge of the rules of his language.
- **Performance:** the actual realization of this knowledge in linguistic communication.
- According to Chomsky, a speaker has internalized a set of rules about his language, this enables him to produce and understand an infinitely large number of sentences and recognize sentences that are ungrammatical and ambiguous.



Then, what's the
distinction between
Chomsky's and Saussure's

