

Introduction to Linguistics

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Objectives

By the end of this lecture you will be able to:

1. define Language and some related concepts
2. have some knowledge about the origins of language
3. determine the characteristics of human language
4. define Linguistics and some relevant concepts
5. recognise the subfields of Linguistics
6. understand the types of Linguistics studies and the scope of Linguistics
7. understand the history and development of Linguistics.

What is Language?

Language is the institution whereby.. (Hall, 1968)

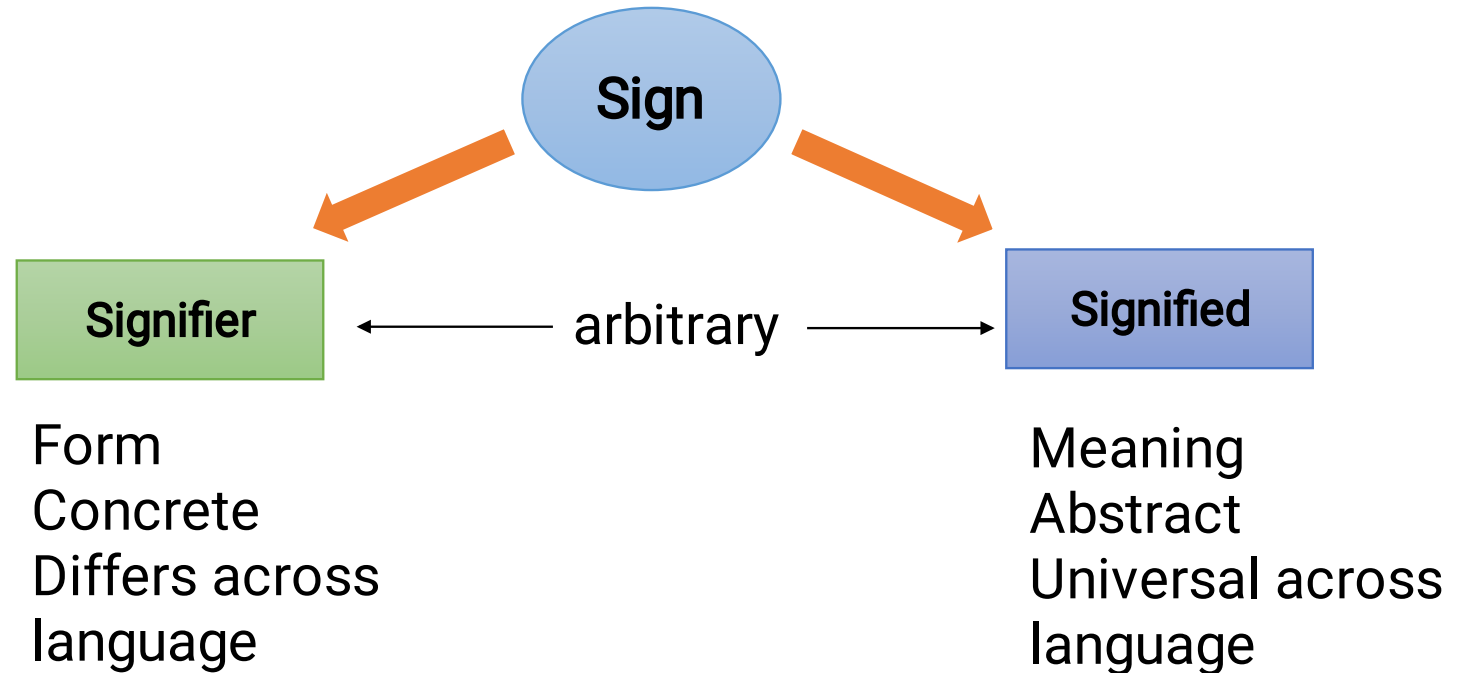
1. humans
2. communicate and interact with each other
3. by means of
4. habitually-used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.

Two modes of language: Speech and writing. Speech is primary and writing is secondary.

Humans communicate not just through language but also through means such as gesture, art, dress and music.

The study of communication systems has its origins in semiotics

According to Ferdinand de Saussure, meaning in semiotic systems is expressed by signs



Origins of Human Language

1. The divine source: God-given Language

- ❖ Bible

2. The natural sound source: Imitation of the natural sounds in the environment

- ❖ Ding Dong hypothesis (Onomatopoeic)

- ❖ Bow-Wow theory (animal sounds)

3. The physical adaptation source/the natural evolution

hypothesis: Human physical features might have helped produce speech sounds. The physical evolution of humans probably necessitated the production of language.

4. The genetic source: Human, over history, developed special “language genes”, innate to the human beings.

Characteristics of linguistic communication

1. Displacement: Human language can overcome the limitations of time and space. Animal communication is designed for here and now. However, human language can relate to events removed in time and space.
2. Arbitrariness: Human linguistic signs do not have any natural connection between its form and meaning. Exceptions are the onomatopoeic words, e.g. The cow mooed, The bees buzzed.

3. Productivity: Human ability to combine limited linguistic signs to produce new sentences and expressions.
4. Cultural transmission: Human beings acquire language. Human languages are passed down by the society in which one lives and grows up.
5. Discreteness: Messages in the system are made up of smaller, repeatable parts rather than indivisible units. A word, for example, can be broken down into units of sound

6. **Duality:** Large number of meaningful utterances can be produced in a systematic way from a small number of discrete parts of language. For example, suffixes can be attached to many roots, and words can be combined to create novel sentences.

What is Linguistics?

Etymologically, the term “Linguistics” is derived from the Latin word **Lingua** which means tongue and **istics** which means knowledge or science.

Linguistics is **NOT**

1. Comparative Philology
2. The learning of many languages
3. Literary Criticism

Linguistics is

The scientific study of language

- ❖ Follows the scientific method: Observation, formulating hypothesis, experiment, consequences, testing the hypothesis and modification of the terms of the theory.
- ❖ Objective, systematic, exhaustive and consistent.

Linguistics is comprised of several sub-fields:

- Phonetics: Sounds
- Phonology: system of sounds
- Morphology: the structure of words
- Syntax: The structure of phrases/sentences
 - semantics: Meanings
 - Pragmatics: language use
- Historical linguistics: development of language
- Sociolinguistics: how different social groups use language
 - Psycholinguistics: language in the mind
- Language acquisition: how people learn language.

In most linguistic studies, language is usually discussed in terms of its two aspects:

Formal aspect	Functional aspect
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="232 425 842 480">1. The study of grammar<li data-bbox="232 488 1137 672">2. Grammar involves the study of linguistic rules that are part of our linguistic competence<li data-bbox="232 681 1122 865">3. Structure of language (phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics)<li data-bbox="232 874 689 928">4. Microlinguistics<li data-bbox="232 937 1122 991">5. Grammaticality/surface structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="1196 425 2078 672">1. The functional aspect of a language deals with uses of a language, how and why language is used.<li data-bbox="1196 681 1547 735">2. Pragmatics<li data-bbox="1196 744 1675 798">3. Macrolinguistics<li data-bbox="1196 807 1966 861">4. Acceptability/deep structure

A sentence is grammatical if its structure conforms to a rule of grammar and acceptable if it is meaningful in society (good and bad uses of language), e.g.,

(a) I don't have any money

(b) I have no money.

(c) I ain't got no money.

(d) Have I don't money any.

Scope of Linguistics

History and development of Linguistics

1. Ancient India

Linguistics as a western discipline has its roots in ancient India. Linguistics was originally concerned about preserving the purity of religious texts (Vedas).

The grammarian Panini wrote a description of Sanskrit about 1500 B.C.

Panini studied Phonetics and Morphology.

2. Greek and Roman antiquity

In the Greek linguistic tradition, language was studied within
Philosophy

The Greek philosophers studies language by asking questions
about:

1. The origins of language
2. The relation between language and thought
3. Parts of speech

e.g. Plato: Naturalists Vs conventionalists

Divided the sentence into two grammatical categories the subject and
the verb

Aristotle: defined the word as a linguistic unit and added the category
of tenses

The Stoics: naturalists/ difference between expression and content/
transitive and intransitive verbs/ active and passive voice

Romans took the grammar of Thrax as a model to study Latin. Their
primary interest was the study of Morphology, esp, parts of speech
and the forms of nouns and verbs. Romans ignored the study of
syntax

3. The middle ages

Described Latin language for pedagogical purposes

Speculative Grammar: Speculative grammarians dealt with language as a speculum “mirror” of reality, relating words and things (signification) i.e, the structure of sentences with the nature of real world.

Investigated whether grammar was the same in all languages.

4. The Renaissance

Two new sets of data that modern linguists tend to take for granted became available to grammarians during this period:

1. The newly recognised vernacular languages of Europe
2. The language of Africa, East Asia and the New.

5. The 19th century: Development of the comparative methods

Sir William Jones thought that Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Celtic and Germanic might have arrived from the same source.

Concerned about the genetic relationships of languages to each other

6. The 20th century: descriptive linguistics/ structuralism

Shift from the study of language change to language description

Studying living languages at one particular time

Ferdinand de Saussure (father of modern linguistics): all language items are especially interlinked.

Language as a game of chess, a systems in which each item is defined by its function in relation to the other item

Conclusion

Self-study activities

1. Match the structures in the left-hand column with the area of Linguistics in which they are studied in the right-hand column.

(1) the structure of words

a. phonetics/phonology

(2) word order/structure of clauses

b. morphology

(3) the meaning of words

c. syntax

(4) individual sounds

d. semantics

2. If you are studying rules of syntax, are you studying linguistic competence or linguistic performance?

3. The natural/logical connection between the form and the mental concept is described as ...?

5. Greek studied whether the form and meaning of words are connected by convention, it is called?

6. Romans ignored the study of?

7. Who is the father of modern Linguistics?

8. What makes a particular study scientific?

9. Can the study of phonology be considered within the scope of
Macrolinguistics?

10. Human language is productive, while animals'
communicative system is..?

11. Can sociolinguistics be considered a core area of Linguistics?