

Introductory Notes:

- **Language as a conventional, arbitrary system of sounds used for communication in a human linguistic environment.**
- **Language as systematic.**
- **Language as arbitrary.**
- **Language as conventional.**
- **Language as sound.**
- **Language as a human activity.**

What is linguistics? the scientific study of language.

What is language?

Language is a conventional, arbitrary system *of* sounds used for communication in a human linguistic community.

I. Language is a **system** at many levels. Not just a collection of words, language consists of rules and patterns that relate the words to one another.

A. **Phonemic:** Phonemes are the smallest meaningless components that constitute the sound system of a language. Sounds that are capable of indicating a difference in meaning are called phonemes, as in “cat” and “hat.”

B. **Morphemic:** Morphemes are the smallest meaningful components of a language. Morphemes are words or parts of words that have a consistent meaning in speech. For example, the word *cats* consists of two morphemes, {cat} and {-s}. Morphemes can be lexical (having dictionary definitions) or grammatical (affixes and function words). They can be free (able to stand alone) or bound (complete only when combined with other morphemes.) Bound grammatical morphemes (or affixes) can be either derivational (used to create new words) or inflectional (used to signal grammatical relationships).

C. **Syntactic:** Syntax governs the way words come together to create sentences. In some languages there are many morphemes which indicate the relationships. In English, we rely more on word order. However, the syntax of English has become less *synthetic* (grammatical structures are signaled primarily by inflectional endings) and more *analytic* (grammatical structures are signaled primarily by word order and function words).

D. **Semantic:** The most important aspect of language is meaning, which is mainly studied under the heading semantics. Semantics concerns the meaning of words, though dictionary meanings are narrow and only one part of

semantics. Semantics is contingent on context. Meaning also depends on the person who hears the utterance or reads the text.

E. **Lexical:** Lexicology includes spelling, the formation and use of words.

F. **Stylistic:** The existence of alternative ways of saying things allows for great flexibility in human relationships. Differences that do not affect the meaning are often called stylistic differences.

G. **Pragmatic:** Pragmatics is the study of the meaning of words in context. (i.e., I like your dress). A difficult distinction is where, if at all, the line should be drawn between pragmatics and semantics.

H. **Rhetorical:** How language is used persuasively.

II. Language is a **human** activity. Though animals can communicate in a primal way, they do not have innate language abilities that allow for an unlimited number of novel utterances. The ability to produce and understand utterances never heard before is called **linguistic competence**. Though some apes have been taught to use sign language (a paralinguage, or parallel system of communication), the breadth of ideas that they express are limited. Likewise, animals don't process language like we do. Dogs, for example, probably understand intonation more than meaning.

III. Language is **arbitrary**. Aside from echoic words, there is no intrinsic relationship between words and the objects or concepts that they represent. Words are symbols rather than signs.

IV. Language is **conventional**. Language is passed down from one generation to the next. It is the nature of language to change. Notions of absolute correctness are imposed by writers, linguists, scholars, etc. and may slow down but do not prevent the natural process of language evolution.

V. Language is **sound**. Linguists are primarily concerned with speech. Writing is a secondary activity.

Standard English is the form of English used in formal speech events such as news broadcasts and lectures.

Constitutive rules: true of all speakers; describes how our grammatical system works, as in verbs typically follow nouns

Regulative rules: govern the rules considered appropriate by educated speakers

Dialect: variation spoken by a group of people

Idiolect: personal dialect of an individual speaker

Form physical shape of a word; denotes the part of speech

vs.

Function how a word acts in a sentence (boring and snoring); the role a word plays in a sentence (the rock and the rock garden)

Prototype theory: a clear example; members of a class having the most characteristics typical of that class.

Chapter Three:

Remember the characteristics of a morpheme:

- 1. It has a meaning that can be at least vaguely stated.**
- 2. It contains only one unit of meaning.**
- 3. It can be used with the same meaning in another word or as a word itself.**

More Morphology Practice: Separate the words below into morphemes.

1. marvelous

2. reviewing

3. shorter

4. finished

5. democrats

6. breakage

7. inflate

8. sheepishly

9. exports

10. furry

11. colder

12. rewriting

13. unchallenged

14. decapitate.

15. forcefully

16. doggedly

17. situation

18. dictionary

19. dragged

20. deactivate