UNIT ONE
Language and Linguistics
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INTRODUCTION

PREVIEW

Dear learner,

Welcome to UNIT ONE in this course AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS. It attempts to provide you with the basic requirements for the study of language. This unit is divided into five sections.

Here are the sections:
1- Language & Linguistics
2- Design Features of Language
3- What is Linguistics?
4- The Various Linguistic Disciplines
5- Language Universals

Both exercises and self-assessment questions (SAQs) are used to ensure the necessary practice needed to reinforce the material already discussed.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Dear learner, upon completing this unit you are expected to be able to:

1. recognize the diversity of language systems and their fundamental similarities.
2. understand and use the basic terminology of linguistic sub-fields, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics.
3. define the term linguistics.
4. explain the linguistic disciplines, and.
5. explain the language universals.
1. Language and Linguistics

Dear learner, have you ever thought of talking creatures other than human beings? Do you think there are certain differences between human beings and animals when communicating?

Talking, shouting, whispering, lying, swearing, telling jokes or tales, in short: communication of all sorts by means of articulate sound is something we are so familiar with that we hardly ever come to think about it as something unique. However, no other creature on this planet shows the ability to communicate verbally in the way we do. Dear, learner,

Take a minute to think about the immense impact spoken and written language has on your everyday life! You could not possibly do without it in situations where you meet other people, like in school, university, or at the breakfast table. The examples are uncountable. In this course, we will take a look at the unique features of human language. As you will see when we proceed, the human curiosity concerning language is no modern phenomenon. Linguists and philosophers for several thousand years have examined language. Therefore, we can look back on a respectable stock of literature on the topic originating from the times of Ancient Greece until the present day. The result is a collection of linguistic disciplines that are interwoven with the domains of, among others, philosophy, psychology, neurology, and even computer science: a vast and fascinating network of knowledge. To keep you fascinated (which I hope you are) and to keep you from becoming discouraged (which I hope you are not), we will start right away with the very principles that make human language so special.
1.1 What is human language?

Language is a highly elaborated signaling system. We call the aspects that are peculiar to it the design features of language. Some of these we find only with the language of human beings, others we have in common with animals. Another aspect of human language is that we express thoughts with words.

Exercise (1)

1. What is meant by the term ‘natural language’?

SAQs

1. Define the term ‘language’.
2. What do we call the aspects that are peculiar to language?
2. Design features of language

- A principle feature of human language is the *duality of patterning*. It enables us to use our language in a very *economic* way for a particularly unlimited production of linguistic units. **How does this principle work? All human languages have a small, limited set of speech sounds.** The limitation derives from the restricted capacity of our *vocal apparatus*. The speech sounds are referred to as *consonants* and *vowels*. Linguistically speaking, the distinctive speech sounds are called *phonemes*, which are explained in more detail in the unit on *phonology*. **You cannot use isolated phonemes for communication, because phonemes are by themselves meaningless. But we can assemble and reassemble phonemes into larger linguistic units.** These are commonly called "*words". Although our capacity to produce new phonemes is limited, we frequently coin new words. Hence, our capacity to produce vocabulary is unlimited.

**Exercise (2)**

1. Define the terms ‘consonants’ and ‘vowels’.

**SAQs**

1. The speech sounds are referred to as….
2. Can you use isolated phonemes for communication? Why not …?

- **Displacement**

In contrast to other animals, humans have a sense of the past and the future. A gorilla, for example, cannot tell his fellows about his parents, his adventures in the jungle, or his
experience of the past. The use of language to talk about things other than "the here and now", is a characteristic of humans. **Displacement is thus our ability to convey** a meaning that **transcends** the immediately **perceptible sphere** of space and time.

Although some animals seem to possess abilities appropriating those of displacement, **they lack the freedom to apply this to new contexts**. The dance of the honey-bee, for instance, indicates the locations of rich deposits of food to other bees. This ability of the bee corresponds to displacement in human language, except for a lack of variation. The bee frequently repeats the same patterns in its dance, whereas humans are able to invent new contexts.

**Exercise (3)**

"What do we KNOW when we know a language?"

**SAQs**

1. Compare the speech characteristic to the gorilla’s.
2. Define the ability ‘displacement’ in this unit.
3. Although some animals seem to possess abilities appropriating those of displacement,….
4. The ability of the bee corresponds to displacement in human language,……

- **Open-endedness**
  The ability to say things that have never been said before, including the possibility to express invented things or lies, is also a peculiar feature of human language.
ACTIVITY

Write an essay on out open-endedness, and then discuss it before your colleagues

- **Stimulus-freedom** is another aspect that distinguishes human language from animal communication. The honeybee must perform its dance, the must cry out in order to warn his fellows when it sees an eagle. **Humans have the ability to say anything they like in any context.**

**SAQs**

1. Compare human language to animal communication.

- **Arbitrariness**

Dear learner, have you ever thought of the following question? Please, think of it.

Why is a table called "table"? Obviously, the thing will never tell us its name. Tables do not make a noise similar to the word. The same applies to most of the words of the language. Hence, words and their meaning have no *priori* connection. We cannot tell from the sound structure which meaning is behind it. Language is not *motivated*, as we can also put it. There are, however, exceptions to this rule: language can be *iconic*, which means that there is a direct correlation between form and meaning. The length of a phrase, for example, could represent a length of time the phrase refers to, like in "a long, long time ago". Here, the extension serves to visually represent the semantic emphasis. Iconicity in language can be found frequently. Another example for *non-arbitrariness* is *onomatopoeia*. These are words that seem to resemble sounds. There are many examples for onomatopoetic words, like *splash* or *bang*. Some names for animals are also onomatopoetic, for example, "cuckoo". Still,
since animals such as the bird are named differently in different languages, there can be no ultimate motivation for the name.

**SAQs**

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<td>1. Language can be iconic. What does that mean?</td>
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<td>2. What do you know about the term onomatopoeia?</td>
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- **The human vocal tract**
  An elaborated language requires highly sophisticated speech organs that will enable the speaker to produce the many differentiated sounds. Only humans have speech organs of this complexity.

**3. What is linguistics?**

Linguistics is the scientific study of language of language, requiring and precipitating the study of human and animal languages and speech with their origins. As the purpose of language is to communicate, any study of communication is a study in linguistics by nature whether so asserted or not. Verbal as well as non-verbal communications are parts of linguistics. The written word, speech, Braille, sign language or the barks of a dog are all parts of the infinite study of Linguistics. A facial tick is not linguistics but a purposed wink or a smile from one to another is linguistics. Because it is intended to communicate something, whether or not it is as accurately or definitely communicated as a language of words is, it is linguistics. Linguistics as a science has two primary branches. In simple terms one branch covers the study of languages themselves while the other covers the effects of language on the world around us.

A casual study of Linguistic science will open your eyes to the constant discussions in all the media about language preferences, uses, types and strengths and weaknesses. It will also help you understand and gain from the discussions. It may also help you if you plan to learn or learn about a foreign language. Should you want to do any study in early or foreign history, the languages of the times
and people will be intertwined with it and Linguistics would give you a whole new angle on the period of interest. Linguistics can help you make and keep peace between you and many other peoples by showing how a word in your language means something else altogether in theirs. It could even help you understand other cultures well enough to avoid social blunders, which could have horrific consequences. It can help you to realize that someone who seems to talk funny actually speaks quite intelligently, in their own tongue, and not funny at all.

Linguistics can help you to answer an infinite number of questions about the world you live in. Why, you may ask? Because linguistics is a science that is tied in so many ways to so many other areas of study. Languages speak of the culture of the people and are the means of communication of most every science within that culture as well. Here are some examples of the types of questions the study of linguistics can give you the joy of answering. Questions like why computers can't use a language other than math and whether in fact math is a language? Aren't computer languages accepted as fulfilling college language requirements now? If computers can only use languages that are based on math, doesn't that make math a language as well as an independent science? Could we process useful thought without language? Are pictures a form of language? Some of the questions more closely related to Linguistics are questions like how do we understand one another? How do we learn our native tongues without a teacher? What causes languages to evolve?

The study of Linguistics is inherently also a developer of several talents. These talents include the use and discipline of personal logic, analytical and critical thought as well as skills of organized debate. Linguistics also enhances one's traits of objectivity and creative insightfulness.

Linguistics will encompass the study of politics and geography. It provides tools for examining almost every other subject. It is a fascinating science in itself and yet one that anyone can study beneficially on some level.
4. The various linguistic disciplines: Survey

In the following, the branches of linguistics we will deal with in this course are listed. This is only a very rough summary. Study this survey carefully. You will get more detailed information in the coming units.

- **Historical linguistics**
  This discipline is concerned with the examination of the historical development of languages. But apart from this *diachronic analysis*, it also deals with the *synchronic analysis* of certain states of language.

- **Language acquisition and communication**
  How do we learn our language? How do the processes of language comprehension and production work? This discipline gives answers to these questions. Also, it takes a look at the role of memory in language and how it is used once we are able to talk. Strictly speaking, it is a branch of *psycholinguistics*, a discipline that emerged from the interdisciplinary collaboration of linguistics and psychology in the 1950's. Research in language acquisition has meanwhile become a strong domain of its own.

- **Phonetics**
  The subjects of phonetics are the *articulation*, *transport*, and *reception* of speech sounds. Thus, there are three corresponding branches of phonetics: *articulatory*, *acoustic*, and *auditory phonetics*. In contrast to *phonology*, phonetics deals with the physical aspect of speech sounds. In order to give a correct transcription of speech sounds, there are several special alphabets involved by the IPA.

- **Phonology**
  Phonology is the study of the distinctive sounds of a language, the so-called *phonemes*. Phonology examines the *functions of sounds* within a language.

- **Morphology**
  The study of morphemes and their different forms and the way
they combine in word formation. For example, the English word ‘unfriendly’ is formed from friend, the suffix ‘ly’ and the negative prefix ‘un’.

- **Syntax**
  The study of how words combine to form sentences and the rules which govern the formation of sentences.

- **Semiotics**
  1. the theory of signs.
  2. the analysis of systems using signs or signals for the purpose of communication.
  the most important semiotic system is human language, but there are other systems, eg Morse Code, sign language, traffic signals, etc.

- **Pragmatics**
  the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationship between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used.

- **Semantics**
  The study of meaning, without reference to the users and communicative functions of sentences.

**Computer linguistics (also: computational linguistics)**

This domain is an interdisciplinary area of research between linguistics and information science. There are two main branches. First, computer linguists simulate grammars by implementing language structures into computer programmes. In this context, the term *computer metaphor* became famous. It refers to the notion that the human brain can be simulated by a computer. Second, computer linguists use the computer as a tool for the analysis of language. For instance, large corpuses of text are processed with the aid of especially designed software.

**SAQs**

1. What in the difference between phonetics and phonology?
2. Define: morphoigy, syntax and Sean antics?
5. Language universals

Nearly five thousand languages are spoken in the world today. They seem to be quite different, but still, many of them show similar principles, such as word order. For example, in languages such as English, French, and Italian, the words of the clause take the order of first the subject, verb, and object. (SVO)

There even exist basic patterns or principles that are shared by all languages. These patterns are called universals.

When the same principles are shared by several languages, we speak of language types. There are several examples of universals.

5.1 Semantic universals

There are semantic categories that are shared by all cultures and referred to by all languages - these are called semantic universals. There are many examples of semantic universals. Let's discuss two of them:

- One semantic universal regards our notion of colour. There exist eleven basic color terms: black, white, red, green, blue, yellow, brown, purple, pink, orange, and grey. The pattern that all languages universally abide by, is that they do not entertain a notion of a colour term outside of that range. This means, any imaginable colour is conceived of as a mixture, shade, or sub-category of one of these eleven basic colour terms. As a result, one way of classifying languages is by colour terms. The eleven color terms are not in usage equally among the languages on Earth. Not all languages have all basic colour terms. Some have two, some three, and some four. Others have five, six, or seven, and some have eight to eleven. Those with two colour terms always have black and white, those with three black, white, and red, and those with more have additional basic colour terms according to the order in the list given above. This is a universal pattern. The languages, which have the same basic colour terms
in common, belong to the same language type. Hence, we find seven classes of languages according to this scheme.

- **Another semantic universal is the case of pronouns.** Think of what it is you do when you talk to someone about yourself. There is always the "I", representing you as the speaker, and the "you", meaning the addressee. You could not possibly do without that, and neither could a speaker of any other language on earth. Again, we find a universal pattern here. Whenever you do not talk about yourself as a person, but as a member of a group, you use the plural "we". English is restricted to these two classes of pronouns: singular and plural, each in the first, second, and third person. All languages that evince this structure are grouped into one language type. There are other languages that make use of even more pronouns. In some languages, it is possible to address two people with a pronoun that specifically indicates not just their being plural, but also their being 'two' people; this is then the dual pronoun.

### 5.2 Phonological universals

Different languages may have very different sets of vowels. If you are familiar with a few foreign languages, you may find it difficult to believe there are universal rules governing the distribution of vowels, but they do exist. Remember our example of basic color terms: A similar pattern could be drawn on the basis of the vowel system. Languages with few vowels always have the same set of vowel types. And if a language has more vowels, it is always the same type of vowel that is added to the set. These vowels may not always sound exactly the same, but they are always created at the same location in our vocal apparatus.
5.3 Syntactic universals

Remember the word order of English I mentioned before. Hmhm, you say: that cannot be a universal rule, since you know other sentences from English and possibly from other languages, which do not follow this order. You are right, but the order subject, verb, object (SVO) may be defined as the basic order of English sentences. In other languages there are different "basic" orders, such as Japanese (SOV) or Tongan (VSO), a Polynesian language. After an extensive study, one can define two different sets of basic orders that languages follow: First SVO, VSO, SOV and second VOS, OVS, OSV.

The universal rule is that there is an overwhelming tendency for the subject of a sentence to precede the direct object among the languages of the world.

5.4 Absolute universals - universal tendencies; implicational – non-implicational universals

Of course, not all universals can be found in all languages. With so many tongues spoken, it would be hard not to find any exceptions. Most languages have not even been the subject of extensive research as of yet. However, some rules appear without exception in the languages, which have been studied so far. We call these absolute universals. If there are minor exceptions to the rule, we speak of universal tendencies or relative universals. In saying this, we take for granted that exceptions may be found in future surveys among languages, which have remained, unexplored up to the present day.

Sometimes a universal holds only if a particular condition of the language structure is fulfilled. These universals are called implicational. Universals which can be stated without a condition are called non-implicational. In other words, whenever a rule "If ... then ..." is valid, the universal appears in the structure of the respective language.
There are thus four types of universals: implicational absolute universals, implicational relative universals, non-implicational absolute universals, and non-implicational relative universals. The final determination of which type a universal belongs to is dependent on intensive field research.

Exercise (4)

What do linguists describe?

SAQs

2. Compare and contrast absolute universals and relative universals.
Overview

Dear learner, by the end of this unit, I think you have covered the elaborated objectives, and made sure that the self-assessment questions, exercises, and activities are thoroughly answered. As mentioned earlier this unit is of five sections that cover certain areas of introducing the science of linguistics. These linguistic areas are diversity of language systems and their fundamental similarities, basic terminology of linguistic sub-fields, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics and sociolinguistics, linguistic disciplines, and language universals.

Preview

Dear learner, after having finished studying Unit One and learning the principles of linguistics which are considered the basic of that unit, in unit Two we are going to:

1. recognize that there are certain ways and places for producing speech sounds.
2. discover that there are three sub-disciplines of phonetics,
3. understand and use the basic terminology of phonetics,
4. define the terms of phonetics,
5. explain the characteristics of speech sounds,
6. and differentiate between consonants and vowels.

Please, before starting Unit Two, make sure you have mastered Unit One.
ANSWERS KEY

Exercise (1)

The term natural language is used to distinguish languages spoken by humans for general-purpose communication from constructs such as computer-programming languages or the "languages" used in the study of formal logic, especially mathematical logic. In the philosophy of language, the term ordinary language is sometimes used as synonymous with natural (as opposed to mathematical or logical) language. Natural language is also considered a field of weak artificial intelligence.

Exercise (3)

- Some of the things we know are:
  - Sounds: [b] is a sound of English.
    - [x] and [y] are not sounds of English (but they are sounds of German).
  - Sound Patterns: English words can begin with [tr] but not with *[rt]
    (compare Russian "руть" = "rtut" = 'mercury')
  - Words: The English word for "cat" is [kæt] "read" is to "read-er" as "reside" is to "resid-ent"
    ('someone who Xs')
  - Word Patterns: "a big ball" is an English phrase; *"ball big a" is not
  - Social Conventions
    - etc.
- Linguistics studies what people KNOW when they know a language.
- Most of the time we learn what people KNOW by what they DO.
- But sometimes what people actually DO does not reliably indicate what they KNOW.
• Someone with laryngitis still KNOWS their language, they just have a medical, physical problem performing (DOING) speech.
• Many external factors can affect performance.
• Linguistics abstracts away from such complicating factors to study the true system of knowledge.
• But we must use what people DO to discover and test our theories about what people KNOW about language.
• Much linguistic knowledge is "implicit", that is, people are not conscious of what they know.
• Language use demonstrates the creative capacity of the human mind
• We can understand and produce totally new sentences
• Language provides infinite variety through
  o a finite set of elements and
  o rules
• How can it do that? Through COMBINATIONS of elements by rule.
• Especially through "recursion" -- putting sentences inside sentences!
• This is the dog [that chased the cat [that killed the rat [...]]]
• What's the longest sentence of English? There is no longest sentence! How can we prove this?
  o Let's say we have a sentence, S, that we believe to be the longest.
  o But then we can make a longer sentence-- "The longest sentence of English is not S"
• Recursion allows for an infinite number of sentences by allowing sentences inside other sentences.
• Human language in not limited to the here and now. We can talk about yesterday, tomorrow, or worlds that are entirely fictional.
  "There is not a giraffe standing next to me."
• Negative, conditional, and counterfactual statements are all possible.
Recursion and displacement are features of human language which are not observed in animal "languages".

Exercise (4)

Linguists DESCRIBE what people know about language.
They do NOT tell people how to speak, they study how people DO speak.
Physicists do not tell planets how to move.
Chemists do not tell atoms how to combine.
Anthropologists do not tell people how to live.

In what way language can differ?
Languages can differ in:
  o the fundamental elements
  o the rules of combination
The units and rules can be different for all of the modules of language:
  o sounds
  o words
  o sentences
But all languages are equally complex, they all have units and rules.
Dialects differ in the same way -- units and rules.
Languages change in the same way -- units and rules.
Children learn languages in the same way -- units and rules.
Any child can learn any human language if exposed to it.
Terms

Linguistics
The scientific study of language

Displacement
The ability to convey a meaning that transcends the immediately perceptible sphere of space and time.

Phonetics
The subjects of phonetics are the articulation, transport, and receival of speech sounds. Thus, there are three corresponding branches of phonetics: articulatory, acoustic, and auditory phonetics. Phonetics deals with the physical aspect of speech sounds.

Phonology
Phonology is the study of the distinctive sounds of a language, the so-called phonemes. Phonology examines the functions of sounds within a language.

Morphology
Morphemes are the smallest meaningful elements of a language. Morphology is the study of these meaningful units.

Syntax
Syntax is the study of sentence structure; it is a part of grammar in the broad sense. There are several ways of defining and examining sentences.

Semiotics
Semiotics is the study of signs in communication processes in general. It concerns itself with the analysis of both linguistic and non-linguistic signs as communicative devices and with their systems.
Semantics
Linguistic semantics examines the meaning of linguistic signs and strings of signs. White another definition.

Pragmatics
Pragmatics is the study of the use of signs and the relationship between signs and their users.

Text linguistics
The traditional linguistic disciplines regard the text as a peripheral phenomenon, whereas text linguistics regard the text as a sign of its own. There are various text types and mechanisms that constitute textuality. These lie beyond the borders of the separate sentences.

Sociolinguistics
This is the study of the interaction of language and social organization. There are several models that determine the variation of language in social contexts both on an individual as well as on a social-group scale. Sociolinguistics is also concerned with national language policies.

Language universal

In general linguistic use, a language pattern or phenomenon which occurs in all known languages.
REFERENCES


