

TOPIC NO 1: INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE

- Language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions.... (Syane and Jindal 2007: 1)
- Language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory arbitrary. (Hall; 1969 (ibid))
- Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates (Bioch and Trager, 1942)
- Language is a system of vocal symbols used for human communications (Wardaugh-1972)
- Language is a collection of signs which are arbitrary chosen and organized according to certain fixed principles that are acceptable by the society.
- Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which thought is conveyed from one human being (a speaker or writer) to another (a listener or reader)
- Language is a conventional system, habitually system of vocal behavior by which members of a community communicates with one another.
- Language is a learned and shared habitual system of vocal symbols through which human beings in the same speech community interact and hence communicate in terms of their common cultural experiences and expectations.
- Language is the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by human beings.

NOTE: With regard to the above definitions, the most possible definition of language may be this *“Language is a system of arbitrary and conventional vocal symbols through which thought (message) is conveyed from one human being to another i.e.: from the speaker or order to the listener or reader.*

ELEMENTS OF LANGUAGE

The definition of language consists of several key terms/elements as follows.

1. System

- (a) Language is a system in the sense that it is a collection of sign or symbols i.e. It assembles together the smaller units to form the larger units and these units are arranged in a regular order for Example; ***phonemes-syllable-morphemes-words-phrases-clauses-sentences-paragraph-comprehension.***
- (b) Language is constituted by several elements which are arranged in a regular fixed order, such elements include subject, verb, object. complement and adverbial. For example:

The boyhas beenhere sinceyesterday

S V A A

He left your book in my room last week

S V O A A

- (c) Language being a system is also constituted by various subsystems such as sound system, structural system and meaning system.

2. Arbitrary

The arbitrariness of language is proven by the following facts.

In language there is no correspondence (similarity) between the symbols (sound or letters) and the realities, meanings or objects which are represented by those symbols. For example: the word dog with the four legged animal, table as a piece of furniture.

However language is arbitrary due to the fact that the linguistic symbols used in language were just picked haphazardly (with no particular plan or organization) i.e. there was no any formal meeting by any speech community which sat to form language. Each speech community has its own symbols representing different realities.

3. Vocal

Language is said to be vocal since each language is based on speech sounds that are produced by the vocal organs, (organ of the mouth, nose and throat) i.e. in spoken form language is presented through the vocal sounds (sounds from the mouth).

4. Symbol

Language is symbolic in the sense that language uses signs or symbols to represent realities, object or ideas. There are two major types of symbols used in language

- (a) The acoustic images (the sounds)
- (b) The graphic signs (orthography letters 1 spellings)

These symbols represent realities, objects or ideas in spoken language; we use the acoustic images (sounds) where as in written language we use the graphic signs (letters)

5. Conventional

Language is conventional due to the fact that any human language (system of communication) ought to be mutually acceptable and understood by a particular speech community i.e all members who use that particular language

6. Message

Message is the key word language has the message since it is the message that is conveyed from one human being to another i.e. language is used as the medium through which ideas, opinions or thought is carried from the speaker or writer to the listener or reader. The participants in language communicate, the message to each other thus message is the central element in any communication system (no message, no communication)

7. Human being

Language is used by human beings i.e. it has been proved that it is only the human being among all creatures who communicate by the use of language other creature do communicate using different systems or forms but they never use language as there means of communication

A LANGUAGE/A COMMUNITY LANGUAGE

A Language is a specific form (system) of speech which is conventional and mutually understood by a specific speech community i.e. it refers to one particular language as used and spoken by a particular community. The speech community can be ethnic group, a tribe a nation or even the whole continent for example Kichagga is a language of Chagga people of Kilimanjaro region, Kingoni a language of Ngoni as a tribe, Swahili a language of Tanzania as a nation, English a language of Europe, America and Australia as continents.

Features of a Language

A language has several features or characteristics;

1. It is a specific concept referring to one particular form of speech (system of communication) that is mutually used and understood by a particular speech community.
2. A language is used to express the culture of a particular speech community i.e. a language is the central element of a particular culture hence a language and culture are inseparable.
3. A language changes and develops with the change and development of culture i.e. dynamism of a language is usually influenced by culture.
4. A language can also change on contact with the foreigners through different activities such as trade, tours, colonial domination etc.
5. A language usually may have script (forms or spellings) different from other languages i.e. each language has different orthography spellings.
6. A language may have phonological and grammatical systems (pronunciation and structure) different from other languages.
7. A language may belong to a group with other languages which stem from the same ancient language for example Kiswahili, Kisukuma, Kihaya, Kinyakyusa etc. are among the Bantu languages hence each language belongs to Bantu language.

THE BASIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND A LANGUAGE

1. **Language**; is a universal concept i.e. it refers to all language in the world as used by human beings. **While A Language**; is a specific concept i.e. it refers to only one particular system of Communication that is used by a particular speech community.
2. **Language** does not belong to a particular speech community i.e. it doesn't have any specific group of people who regard it as their own it belongs to all human beings in general. **While A Language** belongs to a particular speech community that uses it as the means of communication among themselves i.e. a language is owned by a particular speech community e.g. English by the British, French by the French etc.
3. **Language** has no link with the culture of a particular community i.e. it cannot be used to express the culture of one particular speech community. **While A language** has a direct link with the culture of a particular speech community that uses it i.e. Each particular language is used to express the culture of the people who uses that particular language e.g. English for the English culture, Swahili for the Swahili culture etc.
4. **Language** is static i.e. It doesn't change with the change of culture and contact with foreigners. **While A language** is dynamic as it usually changes and develops with the change of culture as well as the contact with foreigners.

Unique Properties/Features of Human Language

Human language has a number of defined properties which uniquely distinguish it from communication systems (form) of other creature such as animals and insects. i.e. there are several features which are uniquely manifested (found) in human language and are unlikely to be found in the communication system of other creatures, this acts as a prove to the fact that it is only human beings who communicate through language where as other creatures do not use language as their means of communication

The following are the unique characteristics or properties of the human language.

1. Duality/ Double articulation

Human language is organized or produced at two levels simultaneously

- (a) Sound level at which human beings are capable of producing the individual sounds which do not convey any intrinsic meaning when they occur separately.
- (b) Grammatical, structural level at which a human being produces the meaningful units such as words or phrases. This is achieved when the sounds combine together to form the meaningful and grammatical units such as words or phrases. At this level it is possible for the same sounds to form different words with different meaning for example /i, b, n/ can combine to form **nib** and **bin**, /e, t, a/ can combine to form **eat**, **ate**, **tea**. Thus with a limited number of distinct sounds, we are capable of producing a very large number of words which are distinct in meaning. This makes human beings economical in the use of language. This feature cannot be manifested in the communication system of other non-human creature i.e. There signals are used at only on level.

2. Productivity/ Creativity

This is the feature of all human languages that novel new utterances are continually being produced or created i.e. language allows speakers or writers to produce and understand new utterances sentences that they have never produced or heard before. This implies that due to the use of language, human beings are capable of producing and understanding the new sentences produced by others. This makes human language dynamic because all the time he or she strives to produce or create new words, sentences or an utterance that is being understood by both a speaker or writer and the hear or reader.

However at childhood, children try there level best to produce new utterances or words. The features that cannot be found among communication systems of other creatures, these creatures produce the signals that are usually static i.e. they are the same and this cannot be produced in other forms to communicate experience and events.

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3. Arbitrariness

All human languages have arbitrariness in the sense that there is no direct or natural connection or similarity correspondence between the linguistic symbols and the message, meaning or concept being represented by those symbols. i.e. the linguistic signs or symbols have arbitrary relationship with the reality or meaning (objects or concepts) they represent or indicate. For example the word table has no similarity with the object known as table. However for the majority of animal signal, there does appear a clear connection between the convey that message. For example a hungry cat produces the cry that represents the actual state.

4. Interchangeability/ Reciprocity

Human language is unique because any person using the linguistic system can both send and receive the message. I.e. human language allows communicator to join here exchange position. At one time the communicator is a speaker and a listener at another time. This imply that when one person is talking, the other is listening and when the listener starts responding, he or she becomes the speaker and the person who was previously a speaker becomes a listener. However this feature cannot be manifested among other creatures because there is no room for animals and other creatures to interchange positions as they usually produce their signals at the same time.

5. Displacement

Human language is displaced in the sense that the human language users (human beings) are capable of producing and understanding the message in relation to time and place. I.e. Human beings are able to communicate the message of the events of different times and places. This means that human beings can convey the message of present, past and future time as well as the

message related to the event taking place at different places or locations e.g. distant event such as football match in England.

However with human language human beings may convey the message on both concrete and abstract phenomena. This is due to the fact that, animal communication lacks this property as they can only be able to produce and understand the message in relation to only the immediate time and place. I.e. they can convey the message on the event happening now and here but not yesterday, tomorrow and there.

6. Cultural transmission/learner ability

This is the process whereby language is passed on from one generation to the next i.e. human language is transmitted from one individual to another not by physical inheritance but by learning. Human language is not inherited genetically from parents instead it is acquired or learned depending on the environment to which one is exposed. That why we say language is culturally transmitted from one generation to another as it is acquired in culture with other speakers and not from parental genes.

This implies that any human language is acquired through learning from one generation to another. i.e. Every person gets language through learning but not through inheritance from parents. However the general pattern of animal communication is that the signals are instinct inborn and there are not learning i.e. Animals and other there signals instinct without learning them.

7. Specialization

Human language has the feature of specialization in the sense that every society has its own physical and social experiences which determine how the society sees its physical world i.e the language of a respective society would tend to describe and reflect the physical features and social experiences which only exist in that society. This is proven by the fact that it is very difficult to translate one language into another since experiences in each language is different. However communication systems (signals) used by animals and other creatures cut across the whole species of animals without specializing to a particular group of the same species.

8. Discreteness

The sounds in human language are meaningfully distinct i.e. the sounds used in language are only meaningfully especially when they are part of a language. For example the words pig and big differ due the presence of /p/ and /b/, ten and pen differs due to the presence of /t/ and /p/. This implies that each sound in language is treated as discrete.

9. Reflexiveness

This is the feature which enacts that human language has the ability of talking about itself. For example we are now using language to talk about language this property of language by which human language talks about itself is what is referred to as reflexiveness. However it is not

easily imaginable that animals are able to cry about their cries so this property makes human language different from human communication.

Competence and performance in language

Competence refers to the knowledge of the whole language i.e. the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use those sentences. It also means the subconscious ability to judge the grammaticality of expression as used in a certain language.

The communicative competence includes the following;

1. The knowledge of grammar and vocabulary of a language
 2. The knowledge of rules of speaking and knowing to communicate according to topic and speech events
 3. Knowing how to use language appropriately i.e. using language according to social setting the relationship between speakers as well as according to a particular occasion
- performance refers to as the actual use of language in concrete situation. It is determined by choice of writing words suitable for the right situation. It also refers to the actual use of language by individual in speech and writing i.e. the ability of a person to use the knowledge of language to produce and understand the sentences without necessarily adhering to grammatical rules.

NB: *Competence and performance go together due to the fact that competence proceeds performance. Competence gives corrections to wrong expressions through performance. But there are times when the two are not connected as one can have performance without competence and vice versa.*

Implications of Competence and Performance

- To show that our ability to use language is governed by certain intuitive capacities. This is the reason to why native speakers of the language are capable to say whether the construction is correct or not even if they are unable to explain it technically.
- It also shows that language ability of an individual can be improved through the use of appropriate methods of language teaching.
- Users of the language have more in their linguistic stores than what they produce. This is due to the fact that language performance is affected by the number of factors such as illness; tiredness, stress, etc.
- Likewise it shows that language is governed by rules. As it is common for the language users to correct errors and mistakes in different constructions of language. This is made possible because intuitively we are embedded with those rules.