

Introduction (Continued)

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What does knowing a language actually mean?

What does it mean when we say that we know or understand a particular language and the rules of the given language or we know how to speak in that language?

What is it to know a language? In last class we explored the idea of **sounds** and how each language has particular sounds or a particular sequence or combination of sounds that is considered acceptable. Some other sequence of sounds which might be acceptable in one language might feel awkward in another language.

Now, what else does it mean when we say that we know a language well or understand a language?

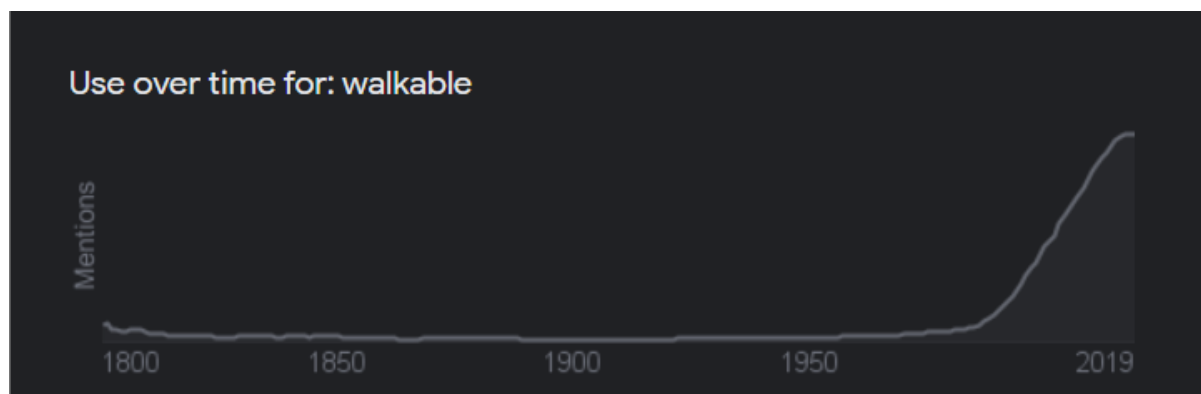
Words

Words have a creative potential and they are not created randomly. We can form as well as interpret a lot of new words that we have not heard before.

But words also follow certain rules, we can't just create words at random usually and we follow certain rules when we make new words

- google(n) -> (v) to google, googling, googleable
Hindi - tumhara yun har baat pe googlana :)
- cuuDable (Telugu) - it is taken from a Telugu word cuuD which means to see or watch but then we have taken the Telugu word and added the English suffix and it is now interpretable by someone who understands English and Telugu while it might not be an officially recognized word in either of those languages

- able/unable, do/undo, cover/uncover —> but not work/unwork, write/unwrite
- read/readable, move/moveable —> but not walk/walkable (walkable is now acceptable but it was not a word in standard English and it peaked during the recent times which shows another unique point in language - the way how new words are constantly being formed and becoming more acceptable)



come/comeable is another thing that's not allowed

- frustaapaa (frustration but in the from where Hindi speakers use paa to signify *the state of being something* like budhapaa, motapaa so frustaapaa is like the state of being frustrated)

In language, new words are constantly being formed and added to the vocabulary as language is something that is constantly evolving and it has a huge influence based on the generation prevalent during any given time (eg: a lot of new gen z words or terms)

Usually when new words are created we need to follow certain rules, it just should not happen at random.

So language has a lot of fluidity which is the beauty of language

Grammaticality Judgement

We know when a sentence is not well formed because of our knowledge of the grammar of the language we are speaking in or using.

- I dance anymore (negative)
- I smoke anymore (anymore dialect)

There is an dialect of American English spoken in parts of Philadelphia or Pennsylvania where anymore is grammatical in this context and it means these days. So something that might be odd for us, or a standard English speaker

might be perfectly fine in another culture or dialect because that is normal and in rule for them.

But going by the rules of the standard language it might be categorized as an error or something that's awkward.

- Rahul ka patni aayaa (gender)
- to on time class come the please (word order)
- sham ho haii rahii (verb-aux order)
But if we change the order and say *sham ho rahii haii* it is suddenly a sentence that makes sense but when we change the order of verb and aux it doesn't make sense anymore.
- It is raining/*it raining is.
- *Baarish ho thii rahii

Hindi is often considered much more flexible word order wise compared to English. For example:

- *kutte ne billi ko maaraa*
- *billi ko kutte ne maaraa*

Now if we try to do the same thing with English

- The dog killed the cat.
- The cat killed the dog.

We can see that in Hindi the meaning of the sentence remains the same but later in English the meaning of the sentence is completely reversed.

So, how does it work out?

It is because of the words like *ne* and *ko* that Hindi has, which allows us to easily show the relation between the subject and the object as well as the relation of the noun with the verb while because of the lack of such terms in English the inversion of the order is not possible while ensuring that the meaning stays same.

In English, we can say-

The cat was killed by the dog

But that's not the same thing because we have to introduce new words and do a grammatical operation to bring cat to the front of the sentence while ensuring that it is grammatically correct without altering the intended meaning.

A person who speaks a language knows what is possible in a language and what is not possible in the language (speaking grammatically we know what is considered grammatically correct in our language and what is not considered grammatically correct) and that is one of the traits by which we can say we know a language.

Appropriate use in Context

An utterance may be perfectly grammatical but not acceptable in the larger discourse.

- Tu kab record karegi? (it is ok to use it with a friend but can't say it to teacher). However it is okay in English.

3 or 2 tier pronominal system in Indian Languages but that's absent in English. In Indian languages we have different levels of pronouns that we use depending on the age and the respect we want to show to the person.

- *coffee taagutaaraa?* (very polite honorific - not appropriate use with a helping hand at home --> what should be used is *coffee taagutaawaa* which is more appropriate when we are using it to talk to a house help or in that given social context)

Like in Bengali if we use the highly polite honorific like *apni* for people when it's not appropriate it might come off as something bad or sarcastic at times as well. So the social context matters a lot when we are using any language. It also depends largely on the culture of the place.

- Chill now, cool, light lo/lite lo, anta scene ledu (to boss) - slang
- In Bengali when we taking a leave, we say "aashchi" which means *I am coming* which although has the exact opposite meaning to our action but it is more conventional and thus it shows how language is very culturally as well as emotionally loaded as well.



What is grammatical and what is not grammatical - what is acceptable and what is not acceptable all of it depends a lot on the convention and the people who use the given language and the rules and conventions that the people of that place or people using that language have agreed upon.

Disambiguate Deictic Terms

When we know a language, we are able to Disambiguate Deictic Terms on the basis of context.

What we mean by **disambiguation** is that often when we are presented with otherwise ambiguous sentences we are able to bring out the correct or intended meaning depending on the context of the sentence that we have been presented with because we are able to understand the terms based on context based on our knowledge of the language.

Example of ambiguous sentences:

- flying planes can be dangerous
the sentence is ambiguous because it has two meanings
 1. flying the plane as a pilot
 2. a plane that flies can be dangerous
- the chicken is ready to eat
(the chicken might get to eat or it might be eaten xD)

Deictic terms are words that refer to a place, person or time

- Rohan ne apne bete ko thappaD maaraa kyonki **vah** piyaa hua tha.
Sumit or chheleke thappaD marlo karon **o** matal hoye giye chhilo.
Compare with English, "Sam slapped his son because **he** was drunk"

All the above sentences are ambiguous because we don't know if we are talking about the father of the son when we use the deictic terms.

- Billi kal raat ko ghar nahiin aaii, pataa nahiin kahaan hogi
Kal ho na ho...kal ki kisko khabar
- Kaal raatre khub brishTi poDechhilo
O kaal aashbe boleche.

In the above examples, we are able to understand whether kal/kaal means yesterday or tomorrow based on the context in which it is used, and looking at the other words in the sentence.

It can be compared with "yesterday/tomorrow" in English or "repu/ninna" in Telugu

So we are able to infer from the world knowledge - that is our pre-existing knowledge about how things work in this world.

- Mother sold the cow because **she** needed money
- Mother sold the cow because **she** had stopped giving milk

Although **she** can refer to both the cow and mother, we are easily able to understand what it means based on the context and our knowledge of the world and the language. (We know when we are talking about getting milk, we mean getting milk from the cow and not the mother. We know when we are talking about earning money, we are talking about the mother not the cow)

All those who speak a language have the above stated knowledge. Are they all linguists?

All these are rule governed. It is the business of a linguist to explore the inherent "logic" operating in LANGUAGE and also be able to describe it not prescribe it.

Extra:

Next day's topic: Synchronic and diachronic linguists

(During our course of study we will mostly deal with synchronic linguists but later at the very end, if time permits, we will be doing diachronic linguistics but it won't be in a lot of depth)

Note to self: Take notes and also read textbooks, the classes are not a replacement for textbooks so we are meant to go read the books carefully.

The teacher also heavily heavily recommended to not only read and take notes but also read the recommended textbooks for class.

New or other things to explore:

- Tower of Babel
- Pidgins and Creoles