

# LANGUAGE MEANING PRINCIPLE AND FUNCTIONS

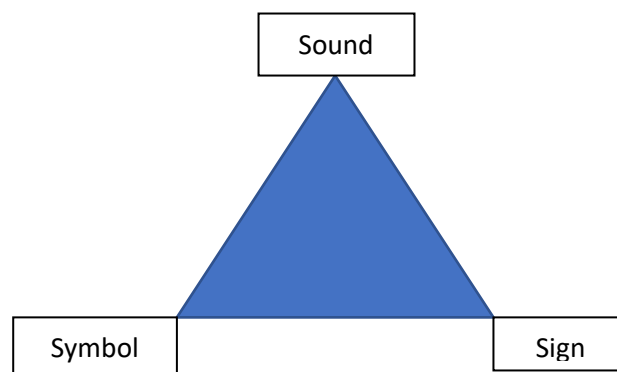
## Learning Objectives

After completion of this unit students will be able to:

- Give definitions of language.
- Develop understanding about the characteristics of language.
- Develop understanding on functions of language
- List out principles of language.
- Develop understanding on structure of language.

The word “Language” has been derived from the Latin word ‘Lingua’ which means ‘Tongue’ so anything which can be expressed by the help of tongue is called as language.

Language is a special gift of god to man. It is language which separates human being from animals. Man alone is endowed with the power of speech. He seems to have a hidden capacity for communication; he uses various speech organs actively like lips, teeth, tongue, vocal cords, lungs and other organs to produce sounds. In fact the process of production of sounds is the origin to human language. Man is able to generate various elements of the language; they are represented through the following diagram.



Here are some definitions of language:

**Jespersion defines-** “Language is a set of human habits. The purpose of which is to give expression to human thoughts and feelings especially to impact them to others”.

**Dr Sweet-** “Language is the expression of ideas by means of which speech sounds are combined into words, words are combined into sentence and combination of sentences gives shape to ideas and thoughts”.

**Sapir-** “Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols”.

**B M Strang-** “Language is an articulated system of signs primarily in the medium of speech”.

It can be inferred from the above definitions that language is an acquired behaviour which facilitates the human beings to express their thoughts meaningfully; it includes oral, written forms as well as body language.

### Characteristics of Language / linguistic Principles

**Language is a means of communication-** Language is taken as a means of communication i.e. expression of feelings, thoughts, emotions and sentiment. It is by the help of it human beings communicate with each other. Without it the communication process will be blocked and we cannot think about a society. So society depends upon the wise communication of people through language, from birth to death human beings communicate with each other by taking the help of language.

**Language is system of arbitrary vocal symbols-** In a language; we cannot rigidly make the relation between the sound of the word and the meaning behind it. It is arbitrarily accepted by some community and hence treated as a language. For eg-a man is called ‘man’ we have not named it so on the basis of some logic or scientific principles.

**Language is Learn-Learning** of a language is not an automatic process. No doubt it is behaviour but behaviour is acquired by making efforts. It is not a type of behaviour like walking, crawling which come to the child in a natural way it is specific type of behaviour for which we have to make efforts.

**Language is a system-** Language is a unique system like human body system just as the body function through different organs such as heart, lungs, brain etc. In the same way language function through sounds, words and structures.

**Language is a system of system-** language is undoubtedly a system, that system involves other complex system like

- A system of organizing sounds- Phonology
- A system of making words- Morphology
- A system of arranging words- Syntactic structure
- A system of visual symbols- Graphic structure

**Language is a system of symbols-** Different words used in a language are the symbols. They stand for a certain things. The language will function well if it's a symbols or noun both of the speaker and the person for whom they being used.

**Symbol of language are vocal-** Different symbols used in a language are vocal. These are other kinds of symbols which cannot be called as vocal. Ex- gestures, signal flags are visual symbols, beating a drum, ringing of bells- auditory symbols they do not form language. In language, the sounds are produced through vocal organs.

**Language is unique-** Each language is unique because it has its own style of functioning. The sound, vocabulary and structure of every language have their own speciality.

**Language is skill subject-** Language should be learnt like a skill, there is need of a lot of repetition in speaking, reading or writing of the language.

1. **Language is related to culture-** Language is a product of the society. Every language has its deep concern with the culture of the people to which the language belongs. Language develops in a cultural context and therefore meets the needs of the society in which develops. For Ex- African language has 120 separate words for 'walking' because in that society walking is the only means of moving from one place to another.
2. **Language is ever changing-** Every language undergoes a change with the passage of time. Language is dynamic and not stagnant. For Ex- The word 'Brunch' was coined a few years ago means Breakfast + Lunch. The word 'whom' is replaced by 'who'.

In 16<sup>th</sup> century, the letter 'K' was sounded in know, knife, knowledge etc....

### **Functions of language**

Language plays an important role in human life. The fact is that human has been made better by the use of the language. Language is means of expression. It helps in the process of communication. Language plays some important functions they are as follows.

1. **Expressive Functions-** Every individual has some feelings, emotions, ideas and he or she wants to give an outlet to their experience of life. By using a language the individual is able to express his view. Lang thus helps in the process of interaction b/w the two individual. Sapir says- "Language is an efficient vehicle of communication, it is a great force of socialization. It is impossible to express one's thoughts in the absence of a language.
2. **Informative Functions-** Language helps an individual in giving information to others. Suppose a person has some important information in his mind and that he wants to pass on to others. Only language helps in giving information.

Sometimes the teacher in the class room situation plays the role of informative gives, he will be able to do his duty properly. Language has thus, an informative function. It is beyond imagination to give or to receive information in the absence of language which includes verbal and nonverbal form of language. Thus language has an informative function.

3. **Directive function-** Language is used to direct people to carry out different functions in daily life for Ex- In the exam hall the examiner uses a language as give directions to the candidates sitting there whereby he draws the attention of all to certain rules regulation which everybody during the exam hours is to follow by using a language he is able to give directions thus we find that language has directive functions also.
4. **Storing Function-** Language stores information we would not have preserved our cultural heritage. History of mankind and civilization if there is no storing function of language thus language has a storing function.
5. **Creative function-** Language has its aesthetic aspect also. The literatures in different languages are example of creative function. The literary creations of Shakespeare, Shelly, Keats, Rabindranath Tagore would not have been either recognized or appreciated.

#### **1. Informative functions**

Every language is meant for giving / receiving informations through it. Through language communication or conversation takes place whatever information is to be communicated, it is possible through some language.

#### **2. Expressive functions**

Through language, we can be able to express our feelings, ideas and thoughts.

#### **3. Directive functions**

Language also helps in giving direction to others. Through it, we can direct a person to proceed in this or that direction.

#### **4. Storing function.**

#### **5. Creative function.**

### **1.1 Linguistic Principles**

Linguistic is fairly new, Linguistic speculation and the analysis of language have occupied man's mind from the earlier days of civilization in a number of different cultures.

Linguistics is the science that describes and classifies languages. Linguistics identifies and describes the units and patterns of the sound system, the words and morpheme and the phrase and sentences ie the structure of language. Linguistic

descriptions are divided into phonology for the sound system, morphology for the patterns and thoughts of words and systems for the pattern of phrase and sentence.

Some of the linguistic principles of a language are as follow

1. Language is learned
2. Language is a system
3. It is a system of system
4. It is a system of symbol
5. It is arbitrary
6. It is vocal
7. It is unique
8. It is a skilled subject
9. It is for communication
10. It is ever changing
11. It is made up of habits
12. Language is related to the culture in which it exist
13. Language is social behaviour

### **1) Language is a system**

Language is a system like that of the human body. The system of language functions through three constituents- the sounds, structures and the words. There cannot be any utterance without making use of sounds, structures and vocabulary.

### **2) Language is a system of system**

It is a system of phonological, grammatical and lexical systems. The principle that language is a system stresses the importance of selectional structural language materials.

### **3) The system of language is arbitrary**

In language there is no relationship between a particular symbol and the object denoted by it.

### **4) Language is a system of symbols**

Language functions best only when the symbols are known to the speakers and the listeners the readers and the writers. Symbols are representation of things rather than things themselves.

### **5) The symbols of language are vocal**

Language uses vocal symbols which are made up of speech sounds. These sounds are produced by human beings through the movements of various vocal organs.

Language is primarily for speech, writing is only secondary. Language lives on the tongues of the people. This principle stresses the importance of oral work in teaching a language.

### **6) Language is learned**

Language is learned activity. It does not come automatically. The child is not born with the skills of speaking. He has to acquire it after he is born. The children pick up languages by listening and also imitating voices produced by the elders. If a child is isolated from the human society, it cannot be able to pick up any language. The ability to use a particular language is not inherited. One can learn the language from others.

### **7) Language is for communication**

The chief purpose language is communication. We use language to inform others, to ask them to do certain things or to express our feelings or emotions.

### **8) Language is related to the culture in which it exists**

A language is the product of a particular society and culture. It has its own meaning only in relation to the society and culture. While learning a foreign language, a person does not only learn that language but he also gets acquainted with the culture of the people who use that language. So, the cultural aim of teaching a language is used.

### **9) Language is made up of habits**

Language is a set of human habits. The system of language helps to gain mastery over different language habits. When a person is speaking he does not consider the position of the various speech organs while making the meaningful noise nor does he think of the ways in which he is putting various words to form sentences. It is because speaking has become a matter of habit with him. So, the teacher should provide opportunity to the students to use the language effectively.

### **10) Language is a social behaviour**

The features of a language are not inherited. In the biological sense, language is a social behaviour. Child learns the language by itself in his environment.

### **11) Language is unique**

Each language is unique. No two languages have the same sound, grammatical, lexical systems. All languages differ in these respects. So fresh efforts have to be made to learn language.

## **12) Language is ever changing**

Language is not static. A living language like human being changes. If we study the history of any language we shall notice the numerous changes that have taken place in it over the years. Changes takes place in all aspects of language. This is more seen in the case of vocabulary. We have noticed that thousands of words have been added to Indian languages after independence. English too has borrowed words from various languages. Besides this, words change the meaning from time to time, say that vocabulary is the stable part of the language. Changes in sounds also takes place. If we hear English as it was spoken 500 years ago, we shall be able to notice this factor easily. Likewise, changes also occur in the grammatical system of a language. So, the language teacher should teach correct usage of the language.

### **1.2 The structure of English language**

Language is said to be structured at different levels. Language basically has the following structures:-

- 1) Phonological structure
- 2) Morphological structure
- 3) Syntactic structure
- 4) Semantic structure
- 5) Graphic structure

#### **1) Phonological structure of language**

The phonological structure is the most superficial layer of organization of language. In phonology the “phonemes” of a language and their variations are described. Phonology is purely concerned with the sound system of English language. Some of the phonological structures of English language are as follows:

#### **1. Phonetics**

Phonetics is that branch of linguistic science which deals with the study of speech sound. It is in fact the most important contribution made by the science of linguistics. ‘phonics’ may be defined as the application of phonetics to the art of reading. It deals with both speech sounds and the letters that represents the sounds in reading vocabulary.

By getting training in phonetics we can arrive at the accurate and pleasing pronunciation of a foreign language. Phonetic sound scripts are basically divided as vowel sounds and consonant sounds. Vowels are again divided into two- pure vowel and diphthongs (or compound vowels).

An vowel may be defined as a voice sound in the production of which there is no obstruction of air passage. The air passage permit through the mouth. In diphthongs, we have

combination of two vowel sounds. A consonant may be defined as a sound which is produced with a partial or complete closure of air passage. English language is basically not a phonetic language. There are 26 letters which have to produce 44 different sounds -12 vowels, 8 diphthongs and 24 consonant sounds.

English pronunciation is a complex process involving a number of simultaneous operations. The process may be broadly analyzed into the following components. They are: articulation gesture, stress, rhythm, intonation etc. the phonological structure of English language deals about sound system and the accurate pronunciation.

## **2) Morphological structure**

The smallest part of expression associated with a unit of meaning is the morpheme. In modern linguistics the minimum meaningful unit is called a morpheme. Morphology identifies and clarifies the morphemes and describes the types of combinations of the words of a language. A word is usually defined as the smallest unit of sounds. A word consists of one or more of these morphemes. For instance, the word 'meaningful' is made up of three meaningful unit for morphemes namely 'mean', 'ing', 'ful'. Of these however, only one namely 'mean' can stand by itself, the others though carrying some meaning cannot so stand. The morpheme that can stand by itself is called a "free morpheme" and the one that cannot stand by itself called as "bound morpheme".

Since language is structured at the level of words as well, every language has its own distinct patterns of combining these minimum forms (morphemes) to get larger units. The bound forms which can be added to the free forms are called "affixes". The free form without an affix is called a simple free form.

English affixes are added either before or after the base form. The affixes that come before the base forms are called "prefixes" and those that come after the base forms "suffixes"

Prefixes in English usually modify the meaning of base form.

E.g. Behave – misbehave

Integrate – disintegrate

Like – dislike

Agree – disagree etc.

The suffixes are generally divided into two classes – those that serve some grammatical functions and others that are used to derive new words from the base forms. According to those two functions the first group is called grammatical suffix.

E.g. Man – men

Animal – animals

And the second group is called lexical or derivational suffixes.



E.g. Appoint – appointed

Start – started

### 3) Syntactic structure

The minimum meaningful form in a language has been described as the morpheme or the word. But it could be remembered that a word written has very little meaning. In fact, a word has only a potential meaning, i.e., It is capable of carrying that meaning when it is used with other words in an organized manner. The way in which words are organized into larger units in a language is called the “syntactic structure” of the language (structure of word sequences in sentences) and this structure is as much carrier of meaning as the individual words comparing it.

According to Linguists, “Syntax is the pattern of arrangement of words in phrase and sentences and the matter of agreement among words. The meaning of a sentence is not just the sum of the meaning of the words in it. The structure or the way, in which the words are arranged also contributions to its meaning. In the sentence there are sounds, definite structural signals which make the structure of the sentence (i.e., the relationship between the words) clear and the meaning that we gather at this level is the structural or grammatical meaning. These signals are –

a. The word order

It helps in deciding the subject, object and the status of the two words.

b. The use of structural words:

It is helpful in recognizing the English sentences and in identifying the nodes.

c. Use of inflected forms

It is useful in identifying the verb and detecting its tenses. With the help of these signals we have been able to establish the familiar S+V+O (subject- verb- object) structure of the sentence and grasp the general meaning[i.e., the grammatical meaning] associated with this structure.

The above three are the essential structural devices which English uses to fit words in syntactic units and expresses the grammatical meaning of the unit. Some of the important syntactic units are as follow:

- i. **sentence or clause** E.g. This is a book that was on the table.
- ii. **A group or phrase:** E.g. on the table, have been running.
- iii. **An idiom:** E.g. GREEK and LATIN IN BLACK AND WHITE
- iv. **A formulae:** E.g. Good morning, how do you do? Good day etc.

From the above selected structures, we are able to arrange the words in different manners. These structures are popularly called sentence structure, group or phrased structure, idioms and formulae respectively.

#### **4) The semantic structure of English**

Lexeme is the smallest unit in the semantic structure. These morphemes are having some semantic component. In common these belong to a semantic set and the individual words in the set are distinguished by additional component. The set is based on a lexical item which can be used for all the other words, the later being used for making final distinctions of meaning. For instance in the set - Horse, Mare, Pony, Colt etc, the word horse can be used for all the other words. Such an item is called the “super ordinate term” of the set, and since it can be used for all the other words in the set, it covers the largest area of meaning.

In the following example with the super ordinate term ‘Dwelling’ - tent - house - cave - cottage - hut - bungalow - home - shed.

From the above example, it will be seen that a word in this case ‘house’ can become a super ordinate term. The above illustrations clearly states that the relationship between the words in a language are a part of the semantic structure of the language. The following relationships hold between the words in a language.

##### **1. Hyponymy**

Hyponymy is the relationship of inculcation of different words in a set under a word that stands for some features of meaning common to the entire set. It is the super ordinate term. In the case of tent, house, cave, cottage, hut, house is the super ordinate word. It has the maximum coverage of meaning as it can be used many of the hyponymy under it.

Incompatibility is the opposite of hyponymy. It is the relationship of exclusion between some words which are in some respect similar. E.g. Red and Green are similar, in that both are colours. But they are incompatible in relation because a thing cannot be both red and green at the same time.

##### **2. Synonymy**

Synonymy means sameness of meaning and stands for different words having the same meaning. English is particularly rich in synonyms. E.g. begin, Commence, start - are synonyms.

##### **3. Polysemy**

Polysemy is the opposite of synonymy. This stands for the same word having different meanings. English is also rich in polysemic words. Many common words like - it, though, take, make, get, etc., have a variety of meanings.

##### **4. Homonymy**

Different words with a same form is known as homonymy. One or more words spelt and pronounced alike but different in meaning e.g- Right- Right, Mind-Mind, Light-Light.

## **5. Antonymy**

Antonymy means oppositeness in meaning. There are pairs of words which are opposite in some components of meaning.

### **THE GRAPHIC STRUCTURE**

In speech we organize sound and words into meaningful units. The sounds of language is known as phonic structure. In writing

We similarly organize the visual symbols. It is the graphic structure. The way in which a language organizes its graphic structure is called “graphology”. Graphic structure comprises of alphabet and the various punctuation marks. But it should be remembered that they are not the distinctive features of a particular language. The same alphabet may be used by several languages indeed, few alphabet are confirmed to one language only. But the graphology of a language i.e, the way in which these symbols are used is a distinctive features of a language because different languages use these symbols differently.

The graphiological patterns in English constitute a hierarchy. The smallest unit in this hierarchy is the grapheme (a single letter). The next higher unit is the written word (marked by spaces before and after) which corresponds to the grammatical word. Above the word are the written clause, separated by distinctive punctuation marks and the written sentences. The last higher order of graphology is the sentence and the paragraph. A good paragraph is structured and represents a logical organization of the ideas, sentences.

The graphic structure of English language include spellings and punctuation marks. The punctuation's can be recorded as a means of making grammar graphic. The various punctuation marks such as the full stop, the question mark, the exclamatory mark, coma, semicolon, the colon, dash, hyphen etc. These are useful for organizing the letters and constructing different structures or sentences and paragraphs grammatically.

### **Check your understanding**

1. Give any two definitions of language.
2. List out principles of language.
3. Explain the characteristics and functions of language.
4. Briefly explain the structure of language.