

Module : Humanities and Social Sciences

Level : 1st year

Teacher: Dr. Nassima Amirouche

Lecture 04: Languages

Objectives:

- Discuss the basic functions of language.
- Discuss the different elements of language
- Highlight the importance of studying languages.

1. Etymology: from Classical Latin lingua (“tongue”), from Old French language

2. Definition:

- a; A language is a structured system of communication used by humans, based on speech and gesture (spoken language), sign, or often writing.
- b; a system of communication used by a particular country or community.

Estimates of the number of human languages in the world vary between 5,000 and 7,000. However, any precise estimate depends on the arbitrary distinction (dichotomy) between languages and dialect.

3. The Basic Functions of Language:

Language gives us the ability to communicate thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others as quickly as possible. But, within that, we can understand language more by looking at its basic functions:

3.1 Informative Function:

The informative function of language is when we use language to communicate any information. Essentially, its function is to inform others by being able to state facts clearly.

3.2 Expressive Function:

As it sounds, it is used to express oneself by giving us ways to convey our feelings, emotions, and attitudes to another person (or ourselves).

3.2 Directive Function:

The directive function of language is a basic function that helps us to direct or command. For example, it gives us the ability to tell ourselves or someone else what to do in any given situation.

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4. Different Types of Language:

In addition to language functions, there are also different types of language and ways to understand language overall. Being able to differentiate these can help you understand other reasons why language is so important.

4.1 Oral Vs. Written Language:

In general, oral communication is spoken language meant for conversing with others. Written language is about expressing ideas through writing words down.

Oral communication is usually more informal and faster, while written language is more formal and slow.

4.2 Denotative Meaning Vs. Connotative Meaning:

Words have a lot of meaning to them, and the meaning depends on the context surrounding the word. This is why there is denotative meaning and connotative meaning.

Denotative meaning is the literal definition/intention of the word, whereas connotative meaning is when words carry positive or negative meanings/connotations. An example of this could be “home” versus “house.” “House” is denotative, being the literal term for this type of structure where someone may live, whereas “home” is connotative and represents a shelter, family, security, etc. Understanding the difference can help you understand the intention of language.

5. Elements of Language:

5.1 Clarity: Using language in a way that ensures the intended audience fully understands your ideas; that your ideas are clear.

5.2 Economy: Being ‘economic’ about how you speak by avoiding any unnecessary language. This means using only the necessary and appropriate words to express yourself while avoiding using language your audience won’t understand. Essentially, this means avoiding complicated vocabulary.

5.3 Obscenity: This refers to ‘indecent language’, including, but not limited to, curse words and hateful remarks.

5.4 Obscure Language/Jargon: This is very specific language that your audience will not understand because they are not familiar with what you are talking about. This could be when your car mechanic explains to you what’s

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wrong with your car, but you are not a car mechanic, so you are unclear of what they're talking about.

5.5 Power: This is when someone uses language to exert power over someone to manipulate them, command them, or to get them to do something they want. It could also be to demonstrate yourself as an authority in the room.

5.6 Variety: This is a speaker's ability to use a combination of all the different types of language aforementioned to successfully and creatively get ideas across.

6. Why Study Languages?

We live in a multilingual world, where connections are now more important than ever. The world is becoming increasingly globalized and knowing a second language can always give you an unfair advantage.

There are tangible benefits to being bilingual:

- It can help you in your career; Living in an interconnected world means that more and more jobs are advertising positions where knowing more than one language is essential.
- It can give you an insight into other cultures. You will be more prepared and confident to travel the world and explore other people's ways of living.

Lack of integration is a real problem for most countries. More often than not, this is due to the language barrier. People outside of their home countries end up being isolated, hanging out only with people from similar communities where their language is spoken. Learning a second language opens up the opportunity for being part of a community with a different culture, and learning more about the world around us.

7. What are the benefits of learning a second language?

As mentioned before, learning a new language is a wonderful benefit in a globalized world. Let's have a look at some of the benefits of learning a second language.

1. It improves your memory

The more you use your brain to learn new skills, the more your brain's functions work. Learning a new language pushes your brain to get familiar with new grammar and vocabulary rules. It allows you to train your memory to remember new words, make connections between them, and use them in contextual situations.

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2. Enhances your ability to multitask

Time management and multitasking are two skills that will always help you. Multilingual people have the ability to switch between languages. Their ability to think in different languages and be able to communicate in more than one language helps with multitasking.

3. Improves your performance in other academic areas

Fully immersing yourself in a language learning environment means not only learning the basics of that language. It means learning how to communicate in another language with your peers or participating in extracurricular activities in that specific language.