



Ministry of Higher Education  
Mohamed Boudiaf University- M'sila  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
English Department



# LECTURE 1

## Introduction to Language, and Culture

Master One  
Dr, Boulanouar S,

# *OUTLINE*

- Various Definitions Of Language
- Functions Of Language
- Properties Of Language
- Language and Society
- Language Variations

# *What is Language ?*

“languages are the principal systems of communication used by particular groups of human beings within a particular society of which they are members.”

(Lyons,1981)

“Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts.”

(Sweets, 1992 )

# *What is Language*

“language is the innate capability of the native speakers to understand and form grammatical sentences, which can be finite or infinite”

(Chomsky, 2000)

“Language is not only a rule-governed system with its own internal rules and logic, but a system of tools for the constitution of social life and culture. Language is used both as a means of communication as well as a carrier of culture”

(Wei, 2005)

What is/are the FUNCTION(s)  
of Language ?

## Communicative tool :

Verbal expressions help us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

## Psychological tool:

we use it not just as a classification system for organising our thoughts, but also for reasoning, planning, reviewing.(vygotsky,)

## Cultural tool:

Language enables us to communicate necessary knowledge and social norms of behaviour to the upcoming generation. This property of language is referred to as cultural transmission. The language of a particular society, therefore, forms part of the culture of that society.

*What are the Properties/  
Characteristics  
of Human Language ?*

Some of the major features of human languages are

- 1) displacement,
- 2) arbitrariness,
- 3) productivity,
- 4) cultural transmission,
- 5) discreteness,
- 6) duality.



## *Displacement*

Language signals may be used to convey ideas about things not physically or temporally present at the time of the communicative event such as a topic that is linked to the past or future.

## *Arbitrariness*

There is no intrinsic or logical connection between the form of specific language signals and the nature of the specific meanings they represent.

## *Discreteness*

Refers to the fact that language is composed of a finite set of units (e.g. words, sounds, gestures) which are combined in a limited number of ways to produce an infinite number of meaning.

## *Productivity*

It means that language can be used to **produce** an infinite set of new and meaningful utterances.

## *Cultural transmission*

language is socially transmitted from one generation to the next,

## *Duality*

The use of combinations of a small number of meaningless elements (sounds, that is, phonemes) to produce a large number of meaningful elements (words, actually morphemes).

# Relatedness between Language and society

- 1. While language is principally used to communicate meaning, it is also used to establish and maintain social relationships.
- 2. Users of the same language all speak differently. The kind of language each of them chooses to use is in part determined by his social background. And language, in its turn, reveals information about its speaker.
- 3. To some extent, language, especially the structure of its lexicon, reflects both the physical and the social environments of a society.
- 4. As a social phenomenon, language is closely related to the structure of the society in which it is used, and the evaluation of a linguistic form is entirely social.

# Language Variations

## Speech Community

The social group that is singled out for any special study is called the speech community. It refers to the a group of people who have the opportunity to interact with each other and who share not just a single language with its related varieties, but also attitudes toward linguistic norms.

## Speech Variety

Speech variety, or language variety, refers to any distinguishable form of speech used by a speaker or a group of speakers.

## Varieties of language

**Dialects varieties related to the user**

**Registers varieties related to the use**

# Dialectal varieties

## Regional dialects

A regional dialect is a linguistic variety used by people living in the same geographical region.

## Sociolect

Sociolect, or social-class dialect, refers to the linguistic variety characteristic of a particular social class.

## Idiolect

Idiolect is a personal dialect of an individual speaker that combines elements regarding regional, social, gender, and age variations. In other words, an individual speaker's regional and social background, his gender and age jointly determine the way he talks. And the language he uses, which bears distinctive features of his own, is his idiolect.

# What is Register?

It refers to the type of language which is selected as appropriate to the type of situation.

Three variables to determine the register

- Field of discourse
- Tenor of discourse
- Mode of discourse

## Field of discourse

It refers to what is going on. It is concerned with the purpose and topic of communication. It answers Why and about what.

## Tenor of discourse

It refers to the role of relationship in the situation in question who are the participants in the communication groups and in what relationship they stand to each other. To whom.

What is the relation between the speaker and the listener?

## Mode of discourse

It mainly refers to the means of communication. How.  
Spoken or written?

# Standard Dialect

## **Definition**

The standard variety is a superimposed, socially prestigious dialect of a language. It is the language by the government and the judiciary system, used by the mass media, and taught in educational institutions, including school settings where the language is taught as a foreign or second language.

## **Features of the standard variety**

1. It is based on a selected variety of the language, usually it is the local speech of an area which is considered the nations political and commercial center.
2. It is not a dialect a child acquires naturally like his regional dialect, rather it is taught and learnt in schools.
3. It has some special functions and it the language used on any formal occasions.



# Pidgin and Creole

## Pidgin

A pidgin is a special language variety that mixes or blends languages and it is used by people who speak different languages for restricted purposes such as trading.

**Features** : limited vocabulary and very reduced grammatical structure

## Creole

When a pidgin has become the primary language of a speech community, and is acquired by the children of that speech community as their native language, it is said to have become a Creole.

**Features** : the structure of the original pidgin is expanded, the vocabulary vastly enriched, new syntactic–semantic concepts developed.

## Bilingualism and Diglossia

**Bilingualism** refers to the situation where in some speech communities two languages are used side by side with each having a different role to play, and language switching occurs when the situation changes.

**Diglossia** refers to the situation where in some speech communities two varieties of the same language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play.

Feature the specialization of function of the two varieties, each variety being the appropriate language for certain situations with very slight overlapping,