

Some Important Definitions

- Psychology is both an academic and applied discipline involving the scientific study of mental processes or mental functions (such as perception, introspection, memory , creativity, imagination , conception , belief , reasoning , volition, and emotion — in other words, all the different things that we can do with our minds) and behaviour (the actions or reactions of an object or organism, usually in relation to the environment; which can be conscious or unconscious, overt or covert, and voluntary or involuntary).

- Psychologists study such phenomena as perception, cognition, emotion, personality, behaviour, and interpersonal relationships. Psychology also refers to the application of such knowledge to various spheres of human activity, including issues related to daily life—e.g. family, education, and work—and the treatment of mental health problems.

- psychology is not a unified scientific discipline, with many different perceptions of what the field entails, and many different standards of what constitutes scientific research.

Definition of Psycholinguistics or psychology of language

Psycholinguistics is the study of the psychological and neurobiological factors (the study of cells of the nervous system and the organization of these cells into functional circuits that process information and mediate behavior.) that enable humans to acquire, use, and understand language. Initial attempts to study psycholinguistics were largely philosophical ventures, due mainly to a lack of cohesive data on how the human brain functioned.

Modern research makes use of biology, neuroscience , cognitive science, and information theory to study how the brain processes language. There are a number of subdisciplines; for example, as non-invasive techniques for studying the neurological workings of the brain become more and more widespread, neurolinguistics (the science concerned with the human brain mechanisms underlying the comprehension, production and abstract knowledge of language, be it spoken, signed (body language) or written.)has become a field in its own right.

First Language Acquisition

- ❖ Language acquisition is one of the central topics in cognitive science. Every theory of cognition has tried to explain it.
- ❖ Possessing a language is an essential human trait: all normal humans speak, no nonhuman animal does.
- ❖ Language is the main vehicle by which we know about other people's thoughts, and the two must be intimately related. Every time we speak we are revealing something about language, so the facts of language structure are easy to obtain; these data hint at a system of extraordinary complexity.
- ❖ Nonetheless, learning a first language is something every child does successfully in a matter of a few years and without the need for formal lessons.
- ❖ Language acquisition takes place mainly before the age of 5 years old. No child fails to learn a language (pathologies aside); and language acquisition is carried out in much the same way.

In acquiring language, the child's linguistic knowledge passes through stages; each stage resembles the adult's linguistic knowledge until the child gains full competence. Children do not acquire their mother tongue by memorisation and repetition of sentences they hear in their immediate environment. Quite the reverse, children are continuously involved in the creative activity of constructing and comprehending new sentences which they have never experienced before . In fact what they do is building a grammar of the language they are learning, a mental system of rules and principles, a theory of their language which makes them able to produce and understand all the sentences of the language.

The very difficult task and the very short time in which it is acquired , added to the poor quality of the language material the child is exposed to (parents ,mothers in particular, sometimes even imitating child's language) confirm the assumption that human beings are born with the disposition to learn language. However, the role of the environment is very important. With no linguistic input- i.e. speech from the surrounding environment- to provoke the acquisition process, a child will not learn a language.