2. Language.

2.1 Definition and features of language: Language is, today, an inseparable part of human society. Human civilization has been possible only through language. It is through language only that humanity has come out of the stone age and has developed science, art and technology in a big way. Language is a means of communication, it is arbitrary, it is a system of systems. We know that Speech is primary while writing is secondary.

Language is human so it differs from animal communication in several ways. Language can have scores of characteristics but the following are the most important ones: language is arbitrary, productive, creative, systematic, vocalic, social, non-instinctive and conventional. These characteristics of language set human language apart from animal communication. Some of these features may be part of animal communication; yet they do not form part of it in total.

Language, the means through which humans communicate, is much more than spoken or written words. Five distinct characteristics comprise its true definition. Language is a system, is dynamic, has dialect, is sociolect and idiolect. Within a language's system are varying linguistic levels. The phonological level is the most basic. It relates differences in sounds to differences in meanings.

Next, the lexical level comprises morphemes, or whole words with attached definitions. On the syntactical level, words are specifically arranged in sentences to convey a thought. At this level, definitions of individual words cannot be considered separately from the sentence, lest misinterpretation is bound. The sociolinguistic level of the language system is shaped by social factors such as age, gender and social class. It is best understood when considering the subtle, yet distinct differences in the way men and women relay the same message.

Language is always changing; it is dynamic. Words that the "screen-technology" demographic uses to communicate are quite different from those of the "baby boomers". So much so that certain words and phrases are lost in the past. The literature of Shakespeare exemplifies this.

The third characteristic, dialect, describes the regional differences of language. Southern American English is very distinct from Northern American English, as is English spoken in other countries such as Australia and London. These differences are as much auditory as they are definitive.

Sociolect is directly related to the speaker's social class. A king and queen may use different phrases and intonation than a pauper, for instance, and the hip-hop generation's language is easily distinguished from those of the "valley".

Lastly, idiolect is the most specific characteristic of language. It refers to the speech habits of an individual. From this view, even twins who have lived together all their lives will use language differently. It includes voice quality, pitch, intonation, word choice and many other factors.

Language is the collection of all efforts human use to communicate. Whether spoken, written, or insinuated by movement and gesture, the five characteristics of language remain relevant and important to human communication.

<u>Language is Arbitrary</u>: Language is arbitrary in the sense that there is no inherent relation between the words of a language and their meanings or the ideas conveyed by them. There is no reason why a female adult human being be called a woman in English, aurat in Urdu, Zen in Persian and Femine in French. The choice of a word selected to mean a particular thing or idea is purely arbitrary but once a word is selected for a particular referent, it comes to stay as such. It may be noted that had language not been arbitrary, there would have been only one language in the world.
<u>Language is Social</u>: Language is a set of conventional communicative signals used by humans for communication in a community. Language in this sense is a possession of a social group, comprising an indispensable set of rules which permits its members to relate to each other, to interact with each other, to co-operate with each other; it is a social institution. Language exists in society; it is a means of nourishing and developing culture and establishing human relations.
<u>Language is Symbolic</u>: Language consists of various sound symbols and their graphological counterparts that are employed to denote some objects, occurrences or meaning. These symbols are arbitrarily chosen and conventionally accepted and employed. Words in a language are not mere signs or figures, but symbols of meaning. The intelligibility of a language depends on a correct interpretation of these symbols.
<u>Language is Systematic</u>: Although language is symbolic, yet its symbols are arranged in a particular system. All languages have their system of arrangements. Every language is a system of systems. All languages have phonological and grammatical systems, and within a system there are several sub-systems. For example, within the grammatical system we have morphological and syntactic systems, and within these two sub-systems we have systems such as those of plural, of mood, of aspect, of tense, etc.

Language is Vocal: Language is primarily made up of vocal sounds only produced by a physiological articulatory mechanism in the human body. In the beginning, it appeared as vocal sounds only. Writing came much later, as an intelligent attempt to represent vocal sounds. Writing is only the graphic representation of the sounds of the language. So the linguists say that speech is primary.

Language is Non-instinctive, Conventional: No language was created in a day out of a mutually agreed upon formula by a group of humans. Language is the outcome of evolution and convention. Each generation transmits this convention on to the next. Like all human institutions languages also change and die, grow and expand. Every language then is a convention in a community. It is non-instinctive because it is acquired by human beings. No body gets a language in heritage; he acquires it because he an innate ability.

Language is Productive and Creative: Language has creativity and productivity. The structural elements of human language can be combined to produce new utterances, which neither the speaker nor his hearers may ever have made or heard before any, listener, yet which both sides understand without difficulty. Language changes according to the needs of society.

Finally, language has other characteristics such as *Duality* referring to the two systems of sound and meaning. *Displacement* which means the ability to talk across time and space, *Humanness* which means that animals cannot acquire it, *Universality* which refers to the equilibrium across humanity on linguistic grounds, *Competence* and *Performance* which means that language is innate and produced is society and furthermore, language is culturally transmitted. It is learnt by an individual from his elders, and is transmitted from one generation to another. Thus using J. Firth's term, language is a '*poly systametic*'. It is also open to be studied from multifaceted angles.

2.1 Structure of language: *Language and the ability to* communicate *is an essential building block of human relationships. It helps us share information, ideas and feelings with one another, making language structure and development critical to groups of people and on an individual basis. Language development begins in infancy and continues throughout a person.*

The basic structure of Language: Phonetic alphabets are wonderful linguistic inventions. They made literacy far, far easier than the symbolic character systems of writing such as the Chinese characters. For example, the Hungûl system of

Korean is known as the *morning alphabet* because a speaker of Korean can in one morning learn the letters and, because Korean words are written perfectly phonetically, becomes literate. Imperfectly phonetic spelling, as for English, require a much longer time to get acquainted with the idiosyncratic forms.

The success of the phonetic alphabets have led people, including linguists, to presume that the basic building blocks of a language are the individual phonemes. Recent evidence coming out of attempts to create computer-generated speech indicates that this is not the case.

A team of linguists and engineers were engaged in a project to create a computer system for scanning documents and converting the files of characters into speech. The character recognition phase of the project was achieved and the team turned its attention to converting the character groups into spoken words. The strategy that seemed reasonable was to record humans reading text and cut out individual character sounds for assembly into words. For example, the recording of a word, say *toad* would be cut into [t], [o] and [d]. In theory then these could be reassembled as [d][o][t] for the pronunciation of the word *dote*. But the reassembled word was unintelligible. The reason was soon found. When a speaker articulates the word *toad* the speech mechanism anticipates the pronunciation of the [o] while articulating the [t] and anticipates the following [d] while articulating the [o]. Thus the pronunciation of phonemes is context-dependent. Thus the reassembly of the phonemes of *toad* in an attempt to pronounce *dote* fails.

Linguists went on to show that a listener can distinguish between the supposedly same initial consonants of different syllables in a small fraction of the time required to articulate that consonant.

What this means is that the fundamental building blocks of a language are the syllables. It is to be noted that auxiliary modifications of the pronunciation of multisyllable words are of the syllable rather than the phoneme. In the case of the tonal language such as Chinese the tone is tied to the syllable rather than the phoneme. Thus the basic chunks of a language are the syllables. Some languages are written using a syllabary rather than an alphabet. Typically a syllabary will have one hundred to two hundred distinct characters rather than the thirty of a typical alphabet. This imposed a greater burden in learning to read and write a language. The reasonable compromise would be to have an alphabet but teach the pronunciation of syllables to children rather than starting with the individual letters. The emphasis on individual letters is almost always misguided because

parents teach their children first the *name* of the letters rather than their supposed sound value; i.e., that *h* is *aitch* rather than *huh*.

Language Theory & Development
The Five Parts of Language Development

o   The basic function of language structure is to help people communicate with one another through speech, whether verbal, written or through sign language. Although there are many different languages, they share the same basic attributes of sounds, word and sentence formation and meaning and cadence of speech.

   Development

o   Language development occurs primarily in infants and toddlers under three years of age. At this age, their brains are developing rapidly and are able to absorb the structure of any language they are exposed to more quickly than at any other time in their lives. As humans age, it becomes increasingly difficult to learn new language structures. By six months old, infants are able to recognize the basic structure of their native language. This development continues so that, by age 3, a child has a large enough vocabulary to communicate his wants and needs clearly to his caregivers.

   Time Frame

o   Child development specialists have noted milestones that children reach by certain ages in the area of language development. While each child is an individual developing at his own pace, most children master certain language skills in stages. Reaching these milestones is important in the development of language structure, since these skills build upon one another. These milestones are set in six-month increments for the first 24 months of life and then in yearly increments from two to five years of age.

   Considerations

o   Language development in children occurs best in homes that emphasize exposure to new sights and sounds, including speech. This is can happen through music immersion, reading books and talking to children about almost anything that occurs, such as the objects they encounter and the tasks the caregivers perform throughout the day. Mothers in particular play a large role in teaching the structure of language to their children.

Expert Insight

o Due to the importance of language development in children, many parents are concerned about the pace at which their child is learning speech. They should address their fears with their child's doctor, who may refer their child to a language development specialist, such as speech pathologist, who is an expert in the field of language structure and development. The specialist will evaluate the child and then make recommendations based on his findings.