

## LANGUAGE AND ITS NATURE

Language is a means of communicating various types of feelings, moods, ideas, information, experiences. To communicate, we need signs and symbols. The Oxford English Dictionary defines language as “words and the method of combining them for the expression of thought.” Dwight Bolinger is of the opinion that, “Language is species – specific. It is uniquely human trait shared by cultures so diverse and by individuals physically and mentally so unlikely one another...”

**In the words of Edward Sapir**, “Language is a purely Human and non- instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These symbols are in the first instance auditory and they are produced by the so called ‘Organs of speech’. There is no discernible instinctive basis for human speech as such, however, much instinctive tendencies, motor and other, may give a predetermined range or mould to linguistic expression. Such human or animal communication, if ‘communication’ it may be called, as it brought about by involuntary, instinctive cries are not, in our sense Language at all.”

**Whitehall** defines it as “the patterned, rhythmical and segmented code of vocal signals.”

**Bloch and Trager views that**, “Language is a set of arbitrary vocal Symbols by means of which a social group communicates.”

**Sweet’s view is:** “Language is the expression of ideas by means of which speech sounds are combined into words, these words are combined into sentences and combination of sentences gives answers to ideas and thoughts.”

**In the view of B.M.H. Strang.** “Language is an articulated system of signs, primarily realized in the medium of speech.”

**Michael Girsansk’s views**, “Language is a set of arbitrary symbols which are placed in orderly relationship with one another according to conventions accepted and understood by the speakers, for the transmission of messages”.

**According to Sawssine**, “The language is a system of signs.”

### *LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING*

On the basis of the definitions given above, we arrive/at a few Important linguistic principles

regarding the nature of language.

1. Language is learnt.
2. Language is a system.
3. Language is made up of habits.
4. Language is a system of symbols.
5. The symbols of language are arbitrary.
6. The symbols of language are vocal.
7. Language is unique.
8. Language is for communication.
9. Language grows out of culture.
10. Language grows and changes.

Let us discuss these principles one by one in detail.

**1. LANGUAGE IS LEARNT:** Any learner with normal intelligence can learn a language. We do not need 'a special gift' for that. But it is not instinctive to man, it has to be acquired. A child removed from the contact of human beings might learn to walk on fours or make meaningless sounds or the sounds he hear. Thus the child picks up the language of his environment. The ability to use a particular language is not inherited but first imitated and then learnt from others. He learns sounds – words – sentences-grammatical constructions of the language by imitation and practice:

**2. LANGUAGE IS A SYSTEM:** Each language has a system. Thus it can be observed and analysed. These analyses give us certain fundamental things which tell us about the rules, a code of law or morality or religion. Language is the linguistic code of a society. It is the vehicle of all human thoughts, feelings and actions. It works through system of sound, uttered with certain degree of pitch, stress and intonation. If a person wants to learn a new language he/she has to learn this system of sound. This language system comprises phonology (the system of sounds), morphology (the system of word shapes), syntax (the system of pattern or arrangement of Sentences), semantics (the system of meaning) and graphemics (the system of written letter shapes). This system being complex is often called system of systems too. All

these systems are inter-dependent and cannot function individually.

- 3. LANGUAGE IS MADE UP OF HABITS:** Here we will quote Jespersen again. He says, “Language is the set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to human thoughts and feelings especially to impart them to others.”

When a person speaks any language naturally or without any conscious effort, without thinking about the word order in framing sentence, only then, we can say that he has learnt the language. For this, one requires continuous practice in the use of language which one wants to learn. A child can learn a language better and quicker than an adult because habit formation and habit correction is more amenable in childhood.

- 4. LANGUAGE IS A SYSTEM OF SYMBOLS:** Our utterances have no meaning if it does not co-relate with certain objects, actions, events, ideas etc. The words should symbolize something both for the speaker and for whom they are being used. If the utterances are meaningless; they are just certain sounds and not language. Language functions though symbols if meanings are attached to them. The word ‘book’ is not a ‘book’ but only stands for a ‘book’ Again this symbol “book’ if understood by the speaker and the listener is a part of language.

- 5. LANGUAGE IS ARBITRARY:** This means that there is no direct connection between the sound or form of any word and the object which it represents. Gairdner and Sharma in his book ‘Talks to Teachers of English in India’ remarks, “The roots of all words and the rules of sentence structure so as to give meaning are all arbitrary. If tomorrow all people decide to change, modify, reconstruct and overhaul the language that they use and they agree to do that in any way they like, they could do that, and that would be their language.”

There is no scientific explanation for any word we use to mean that particular object. The object and the symbol attached to it is what people have it in mind. If tomorrow they reject the word and replace it which they feel is better or which suits well, they can do it.

- 6. THE SYMBOLS OF A LANGUAGE ARE VOCAL:** Language and its symbols are primarily meant for speaking, writing is just a secondary representation of language. Language cannot exist in vacuum. The basis of language is speech. It is one of the most effective means of Communication. Gestures, pictures, signals, flags and traffic lights are common visual symbols conveying the meanings but only if there is a language operating.

**7. LANGUAGE IS UNIQUE:** No two languages are the same. Each language has its own structure sounds and words which makes it distinctive. The structure pattern of English is S.V.O. while in Hindi it is S.O.V. Geographical and cultural diversities also bring differences in two languages amidst which language grows. So there is no identity between any two languages in sounds, stress intonation and structure. Similarities in the languages belonging to the same linguistic group may be found. No language can be learnt resorting to the use of other language.

**8.LANGUAGE IS FOR COMMUNICATION:** Right language comes with (right use of pronunciation and intonation which is intelligible to others.

Christopherson says that language is a means of communication. If we are able to put across our thoughts to the person we are talking to, then we are successful language users; if we fail, we fail as language user.

**9.LANGUAGE GROWS OUT OF CULTURE:** Language has a validity only in its culture. Language exists in its speaker, the speaker in specific social group/place and specific situation. The language is complete only in the sense that it interprets completely the culture of a society which is using it. It explains material and non-material sense of culture. Thus all the words become meaningful only in relation to their society and

culture. C.C. Fries says, “The only basis for ‘correctness’ in a language is in the usage of its native speakers.” To meet the needs of the society in which it develops one can reshape and remodel the language. If the society needs certain set of words they have to be evolved and developed.

**10.LANGUAGE GROWS AND CHANGES:** Nothing is static so how can language be. As the culture changes, language also changes. What we say today, may not be true about it tomorrow. The pupils should be taught that form of language which is in use because a language is dynamic and living. Dynamism, an essential characteristic of a living language, depends upon cultural change. Many new words are coined. Many pronunciations change. Some words become old and obsolete giving place to new words which are borrowed and absorbed in a language from time to time .