

## UNIT 1- Key properties of language

A language is a **system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing.**

Language is the most frequently used and most highly developed form of human communication that man has possessed. *It is a group of sounds distinguishable from one another and arranged in a system by means of which thoughts and feelings can be communicated from one person to another.* (Ernest W. Grey, *A Brief Grammar of Written English*).

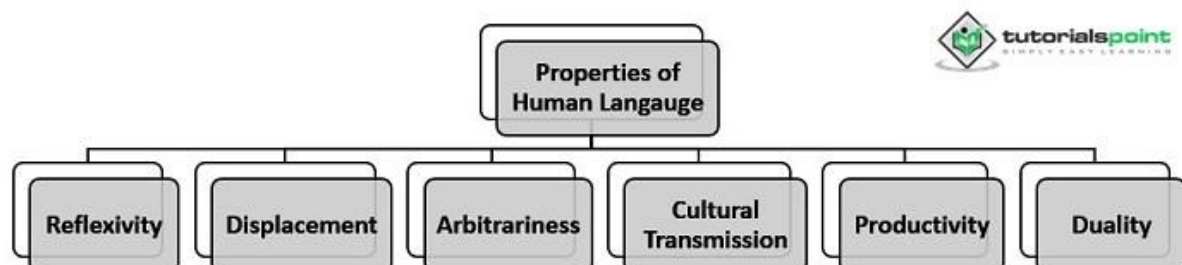
Language is a means of communicating and interacting with others. Language started as abstract symbols to a systematic form of communication. At present, there are more than 7,100 languages spoken across the globe. Language is the institution through which humans communicate and interact with one another using commonly used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.

## Human Language

Language is a formalized form of speech. A language's grammar is its structure, while its vocabulary is its free-form elements. Humans primarily communicate using languages, which can be expressed orally, visually, or in writing. Many languages, including the most extensively used ones, have writing systems that allow recording sounds or signals for later activation. The transmission of human language is not reliant on a single medium, such as sight or sound, and it varies greatly between cultures and over time. Human languages are productive and displacing and depend on social convention and education.

## Properties of Human Language

Although languages vary greatly, they are all enabled by the same genetic information, processed in the same ways by the brain. All share basic "design elements" and structural qualities that allow them to function. For instance, even though different languages employ various sounds, these sounds are mixed and ordered per just a few basic rules. Language sounds and combinations should change randomly if no shared, universal language characteristics exist. Language sounds and their combinations are instead constrained and ordered. Similar restrictions apply to all languages' word combinations to form phrases and sentences.



### Reflexivity

The property of reflexivity accounts for the fact that **we can use language to think and talk about language** itself, making it one of the distinguishing features of human language. Without this ability, we wouldn't be able to reflect on or identify any of the other distinct properties of human language.

All animals communicate in some fashion. However, we assume that other organisms do not examine or reflect on how they develop their expressive messages (or not). If you think about dogs, you can reasonably guess that one barking dog is not telling another barking dog to stop or to run or to come. Humans can consider language and its applications, and reflexivity is happening here.

## Displacement

People can speak of the past and the future. This feature of human language is referred to as **displacement**. Language users can utilize it to discuss subjects that are not currently happening around them. With the aid of displacement, we can discuss creatures and locations (such as angels, fairies, Santa Claus, Superman, heaven, and hell) whose existence we cannot even be certain of.

Animal speech appears to be primarily intended for the present moment; it is considered that the majority of animals speak in the present. It is not used to connect events that occurred at a distance in time or space. For instance, when you pet a cat, it meows right now, not yesterday or tomorrow. Bees are a slight exception to this rule because they use some form of displacement in their communication. A honeybee can engage in a dance routine to let the other bees know where it found a supply of nectar when it returns to the beehive. The other bees can determine the location of this recently discovered feast based on the sort of dance. This counts as displacement, but of a very specific kind. It simply lacks the breadth of possibilities present in human language.

## Arbitrariness

Language is also arbitrary, which is a fundamental feature. Words rarely have a coherent or guiding relationship to what they mean. The aspect of language where there is no natural connection between linguistic signs and objects is called arbitrariness. For example, there is no natural connection between the word 'table' and the object made of wood with poles to support and a flat top. The choice of symbols used by a language is, however, said to be **arbitrary**. This is because there is no direct relationship between a particular word and its meaning. For example, in English we use the word *cup* to represent a physical object capable of holding liquids, which usually has a handle, and which humans use to drink from. Each particular language (English, French, Russian, Chinese, and so on) uses a different set of symbols. So, for example, the word-symbol for *cup* in French is *tasse* but in Portuguese it is *copo*.

Arbitrariness is a useful property because it increases the **flexibility of language**. The flexibility arises because language is not constrained by the need to match the form of a word and its meaning. Because of this it is possible to construct an almost infinite number of words from a limited set of speech sounds.

These are **onomatopoeic words**: words that imitate the sound associated with an object or an action. For example, in the utterance *the bees were buzzing* the word *buzzing* sounds similar to the noise bees make. Other examples include *hiss* and *hoot*. The features of such words are often exploited in the writing of poetry.

## Cultural Transmission

While we get our parents' physical traits like dark hair and brown eyes, we do not get their linguistic traits. We do not learn a language from our parents' genes; rather, we learn it in a community of speakers. An infant born to Korean parents in Korea but adopted and raised by

English-speaking parents in the United States from birth will physically resemble their parents but invariably speak English.

It is called "cultural transmission," when a language is passed down from one generation to the next. Generally, people have some innate propensity to learn a language. However, the capacity to speak a particular language, like English, is not something we are born with. When we are young, we learn our first language.

One of the most obvious examples of this is the formal teaching in our schools, the majority of which is undertaken using spoken language. The child who sits on a parent's lap and listens to stories of family traditions and events is also learning through language. 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. **Tarzan is a good example.**

If a kitten has similar early experiences, it will still meow. Even raised with a group of dogs it will not bark but meow

## **Productivity**

Humans invent new terms by modifying existing verbal resources to describe novel objects and circumstances. Such as technical terms, medical terms, scientific terms etc... as new vocabulary of COVID 19, 'CORONA'. 'Cryptocurrency', 'fantoosh', 'fantabulous'

Productivity (also known as "creativity" or "open-mindedness") is a quality that means that there are an endless number of possible utterances in all human languages. Is that a word? This is a common question people have when they first hear a word. If they question a linguist, they will probably get the response, "It is now." Even though a novel word is not listed in a dictionary, it is still considered a real word provided it is produced following its language's morphological and phonological principles and makes sense when used in context.

## **Duality**

Human language is simultaneously organized at two levels. This characteristic is known as duality. Individual sounds, such as **n, b, and I**, are produced physically when we talk, and none of these distinct variants have inherent significance when considered separate sounds. We have another level in a combination, like a **bin**, that has a different meaning than the meaning of the combination in the **nib**. As a result, we have separate sounds on one level and distinct meanings on a different level. The fact that we can create diverse sound combinations (like words) using a small collection of sounds makes this duality of levels one of the most practical aspects of human language.

We have already seen an example of this above when considering **duality**. We noted that the combination of the secondary level elements 'c', 'a', and 't' may combine to form the primary level unit **cat**. These three elements may also be recombined to form the word **act**. However, the combination 'a' + 't' + 'c' to form 'atc' is meaningless (in English).

## **Specialization**

This key property refers to the fact that language allows us to substitute an arbitrary word for a physical action. An example might be a child who instructs their friend to 'Stay away!' This utterance means that the child does not then have to act out his or her message: for example, by physically pushing the friend away. Similarly, the police officer who instructs a crowd to 'Move along!' has used language to substitute for the physical action of driving the crowd forwards. In both instances the language has substituted for a physical action.

## Interchangeability

**Humans can transmit and receive identical linguistic signals, and so reproduce any linguistic message they understand.** This allows for the interlocutory roles of 'speaker' and 'listener', within the context of linguistic communication, to alternate between the conversation's participants via turn taking.

**for example:** the female silkworm moth can only send messages, and the males can only receive messages. Peacocks can communicate through a dance by spreading feathers, but female pea hens cannot.

## Other features

Many more features exist in human language, although they may not be unique. Other features might include –



**Other Features**

- **Vocal-auditory Channel**
- **Directional Reception and Broadcast Transmission**
- **Interchangeability**
- **Specialization**
- **Total Response**
- **Rapid Fading**

- **Vocal-Auditory channel** – Human verbal communication is generally created by the vocal organs and heard by the ears via the vocal-auditory channel. On the other hand, linguistic communication may be delivered without sound via writing. Furthermore, many other animals, such as dolphins, employ the vocal-auditory channel.
- **Directional reception and broadcast transmission** – Any auditory system within earshot may hear a signal, and the source can be determined using the ear's direction-finding abilities.
- **Rapid fading** – Unlike animals or writing, auditory communications are transient and do not wait for the hearer's convenience.
- **Interchangeability** – Any linguistic signal's speaker/sender can also be a listener/receiver.
- **Total response** – Speakers can hear and reflect on anything they say (unlike visual displays). Frequently utilized in animal courting, although not apparent to the displayer).
- **Specialization** – Speech sound waves have no purpose but to convey meaning (unlike music). Dogs' loud panting has a physiologic function).

## Conclusion

The study of human language is as diverse as human language itself. Its various properties, structure, diversity, and uniqueness make it beautiful. Philosophers and scientists have long discussed the nature and function of language, and there still needs to be an agreement on when humans first began to communicate. At the level of language learning, several

principles are at work. These include understanding the sound system and knowledge of word meanings and suitable social contexts.

## Components of Language

A language is **a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing.**

Linguists have identified five basic components (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) found across languages.

Language acquisition progresses across these components with increasing quantity (e.g., sounds, words, and sentence length) and gradual refinement, and understanding of the subtler and more complex points of usage (e.g., using “taught” rather than “teached”). Readers are encouraged to explore the literature in the field of language development to better understand and appreciate the oral language skills students may bring to the reading process. Speech and language pathologists are a great resource for identifying resources in this area and assisting in determining whether a child’s language skills are developing normally and providing support when assessment and intervention may be required.

### Phonemes/Phonology

The smallest units of sound that make up a language are called **phonemes**. For example, the word “that” contains three phonemes the “th” represents one phoneme /θ/, the “a” maps to the short a sound /ă/, and the “t” to its basic sound /t/.

**Phonology:** The study of speech structure within a language, including both the patterns of basic speech units and the accepted rules of pronunciation, is known as **phonology**.

### Morphemes / Morphology

Moving to the next level of language, we find the study of the smallest units of meaning, **morphemes**. Morphemes include base words, such as “hat,” “dog,” or “love,” as well as affixes, such as “un-,” “re-,” the plural “s” or “es,” and the past tense “ed.” For ex. ‘long’ - ‘along’, ‘cross’ - ‘**a**cross’, ‘in’ - ‘**w**ithin’

Knowledge of the morphology of our language is critical to vocabulary development and reflects the smallest building blocks for comprehension.

### Syntax

The study of how individual words and their most basic meaningful units are combined to create sentences is known as **syntax**.

A syntax are words grouped together following the rules of grammar for any language, while we communicate. It is the knowledge of syntax that allows us to recognize that the following two sentences, while containing different word order and levels of complexity, have the same meaning. • The boy hit the ball. • The ball was hit by the boy.

Syntax also allows us to accept “I went to the store” as a meaningful (grammatical) sentence while “To store went I” would not be acceptable English.

### Semantics

Semantics refers to the ways in which a language conveys meaning. It is our

understanding of semantics that allows us to recognize that someone who is “**green with envy**” has not changed hue, but refers to being jealous.

or that “having cold feet” has less to do with the appendage at the end of our legs and more to do with our anxiety or about a new experience.

Because semantics moves beyond the literal meaning of words and is culture-dependent, this is among the most difficult aspects of language for individuals who are not native speakers and even those who speak the same language but come from different cultures and convey meaning using words in unique ways.

### **Pragmatics**

“Pragmatics’ refers to the ways the members of the speech community achieve their goals using language.” The way we speak to our parents is not the same as the way we interact with a sibling, for example. The language used in a formal speech may bear little resemblance to what we would hear at a lunch with five friends. The conversational style of day-to-day interactions is quite different from the language used even when reading a storybook to a toddler. Knowing the difference and when to use which style is the essence of **pragmatics**.