CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

What is Language?

 The ability to use language, perhaps more than any other attribute, distinguishes humans from other animals.

• But what does it mean to know a language?

Linguistic Knowledge

- When you know a language, you can speak (or sign) and be understood by others who know that language.
- Five-year-olds already know their first language(s).
- The ability to use a language requires profound knowledge that most speakers don't know that they know.

Knowledge of the Sound System

- When we know a language, we know what sounds (or signs) are used in the language and which sounds (or signs) are not
- This also includes knowing how the sounds of the language can be combined
 - Which sounds may start a word
 - Which sounds may end a word
 - Which sounds may follow each other within a word

Knowledge of Words

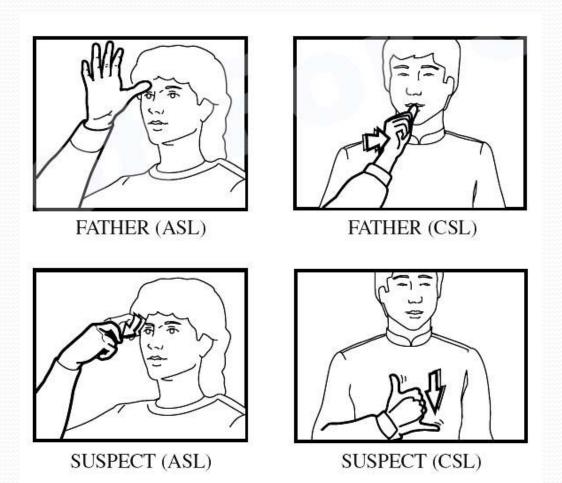
- Knowing a language also means identifying certain strings of sounds as meaningful words
- Most words in all languages are arbitrary connections of sound to meaning



hand (English) nsa (Twi) main (French) ruka (Russian)

Knowledge of Words

 The conventional and arbitrary relationship between form and meaning is also true in sign languages



- **Sound symbolism:** there are some words whose pronunciation seems to reflect the meaning
 - Onomatopoeia:
 - English cock-a-doodle-doo and Finnish kukkokiekuu
 - English gobble gobble and Turkish glu-glu
 - -English *gl* and the concept of sight:
 - glare, glint, gleam, glitter, glossy, glance, glimpse
 but there is also
 - gladiator, glucose, glory, glutton, globe, etc.

Creativity of Linguistic Knowledge

- Every language has an infinite number of possible sentences
- Knowing a language enables you to:
 - Create a sentence that has never been uttered before
 - Understand a sentence that has never been uttered before
- Most sentences we use are new; very few sentences are stored in our brains

Knowledge of Sentences and Nonsentences

- Language is more than a set of words because words must be ordered in certain ways to create sentences
- Our knowledge of language allows us to separate possible sentences from nonsentences
 - What he did was climb a tree
 - *What he thought was want a sports car

Linguistic Knowledge and Performance

- Knowledge: what we know about a language (linguistic competence)
 - Mostly unconscious knowledge about sounds, structures, meanings, words, and rules for combining linguistic elements
- **Performance:** how we use this knowledge in actual speech production and comprehension
 - We can theoretically create an infinitely long sentence, but physical constraints make this impossible
 - In speech we stammer, pause, and produce slips of the tongue

What Is Grammar?

- **Grammar** = the knowledge speakers have about the units and rules of their language
 - Rules for combining sounds into words, word formation, making sentences, assigning meaning
 - When a sentence is ungrammatical in a linguistic sense, it means that it breaks the rules of the shared mental grammar of the language

Descriptive Grammar

- Descriptive grammar: a true model of the mental grammar of language speakers
 - In other words, a descriptive grammar describes the linguistic rules that people use when they speak their language
 - The point of view of a descriptive grammarian is that grammars from every language and dialect are equal

Prescriptive Grammar

- **Prescriptive Grammar:** attempts to prescribe what rules of language people *should use to speak "properly"*
 - The view of a prescriptive grammarian is that some grammars are better than others
- During the Renaissance, a middle class of English speakers wished to talk like the upper class, so they started buying handbooks that told them how to speak "properly"

- Lowth decided that "two negatives makes a positive," therefore people should not use double negatives
 - Despite the fact that everybody was already using double negatives in English (and communication was just fine)

Dialects

- Prescriptive Grammars usually argue for a standardized dialect.
- Regional forms or forms restricted to group class are frowned upon
- Dialects have grammars
- Rules are systematic

The "Standard"

- When a standard is the dialect of the wealthy and powerful, people may be required to speak that dialect in order to get ahead
- Every dialect is equally expressive, logical, complex, and systematic
 - All dialects represent a set of rules or lexical items in the minds of speakers, and any value judgments on dialects are social judgments

Teaching Grammar

• A **teaching grammar** explicitly states the rules of a language and is used to learn another language or dialect.

-Teaching grammars assume the student already knows one language and then compares the grammar of the new language to the one they already know

Universal Grammar

- Universal Grammar (UG) refers to the universal properties that all languages share
 - Part of a biologically endowed human language faculty
 - The basic blueprint that all languages follow
- It is a major goal of linguistic theory to discover the nature of UG

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRAMMAR

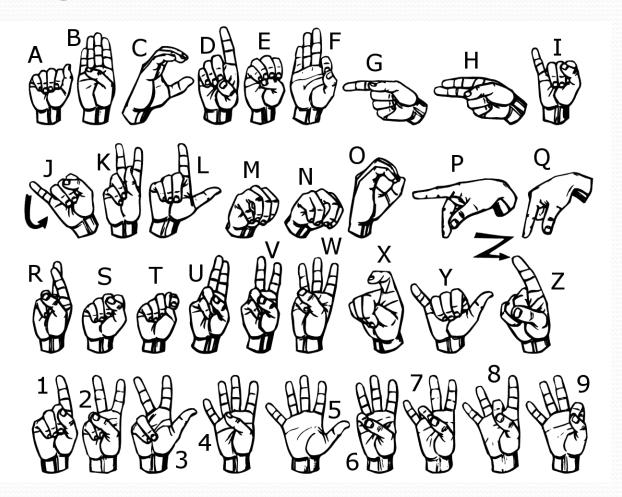
Descriptive
Adequacy:
Describing the knowledge

Explanatory
Adequacy:
Explaining how this knowledge is acquired

Linguistic Theory

- All normal children acquire language relatively quickly and easily and without instruction.
- Children learn the world's languages in the same way and pass through the same stages of acquisition.
- If children are born with Universal Grammar, then they can acquire language so quickly and easily because they already know the universal properties of language and only need to learn the specific rules of the language(s) they are acquiring.

SIGN LANGUAGES: Evidence for Language Universals



- Sign languages are principally used among members of what linguists call the "culturally deaf" communities.
- Deaf children exposed to sign languages go through the same stages of language acquisition as hearing babies.
- Sign languages rely on hand signs, facial expressions, body positions, motions and other physical signs (perhaps including mouthing the words) in order to communicate.

American Sign Language (ASL)

- The major language of the deaf community in the United States is **American Sign Language (ASL)**.
- ASL is an outgrowth of the sign language used in France and brought to the United States in 1817 by the great educator Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet.

WHAT IS NOT (HUMAN) LANGUAGE

- All languages share certain fundamental properties, and children naturally acquire these languages whether they are spoken or signed.
- Both modalities are equally accessible to the child because human beings are designed for human language.

- Some features of human language:
 - **Discreteness:** the ability to combine linguistic units to make larger units of meaning
 - **Creativity:** the ability to create and understand never-before-uttered sentences
 - **Displacement:** the ability to talk about things that are not physically present
 - *Allows for discussion of past events, abstract ideas, lying, etc.

- **Birdcalls** convey messages associated with the immediate environment.
- Bird songs are used to stake out territory and attract mates.
 - There is no evidence of internal structure in these songs, although they may vary to express varying degrees of intensity
- Birdcalls and songs are similar to human languages in that they contain regional dialects, are passed down from parents to offspring, and can only be acquired before a certain age.

- Honeybees have a communication system that relies on dance to convey information about the location and quality of food sources to the rest of the hive.
 - <u>Round dance</u>: food source is within 20 feet from the hive
 - <u>Sickle dance</u>: food source is 20 to 60 feet from the hive
 - <u>Tail-wagging dance</u>: food source is more than 60 feet from the hive
 - *The number of repetitions of the basic pattern in the tailwagging dance indicates the precise distance, with a slower repetition rate indicating a longer distance.

- The bee dances are theoretically able to create an infinite number of messages.
 - But, the messages are confined to the subject of food sources.
 - If there are any special circumstances regarding the food source, the bee cannot convey that information.

Can Animals Learn Human Language?

- Nonhuman primates have communication systems in the wild to convey information about the immediate environment and emotional state (stimulus-response).
- Humans have attempted to teach human language to other primates.
 - These nonhuman primates were taught sign languages because their vocal tracts cannot produce the sounds of human language.

- Parrots can mimic words, but their utterances carry no meaning.
- They cannot dissect words into discrete units.
 - *Polly and Molly* don't rhyme for a parrot.
- They cannot deduce rules and patterns to create new utterances.
 - If the parrot learns "Polly wants a cracker" and "Polly wants a doughnut" and learns the word "bagel," the parrot will not say "Polly wants a bagel".

- Washoe
- Koko
- Nim Chimpsky
- Sarah, Lana, Sherman, Austin
- Kanzi

- Researchers concluded that while nonhuman primates can string two signs together and show flashes of creativity, their use of language is nowhere near human linguistic ability.

Language and Thought

- **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis:** the theory that the structure of a language influences how its speakers perceive the world around them
- Linguistic determinism: the strongest form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which claims that the language we speak determines how we perceive the world
 - Whorf claimed that the Hopi people do not perceive time in the same way as speakers of European languages because the Hopi language does make grammatical distinctions in tense

 Hopi does have a system for expressing time. Hopi uses words for days of the week, parts of the day, etc. to express tense rather than using word endings like English

 Although languages differ in their color terms, speakers can perceive differences even if their language does not have a word to express the difference

- Linguistic relativism: a weaker form of the hypothesis which claims that different languages encode different categories which can influence a speaker's perceptions of the world
 - Navaho: green and blue expressed as one word
 - Russian: siniy ("dark blue") and goluboy ("light blue")
 - Zuni: yellow and orange are expressed as one word

 The strong form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is clearly false

- We can translate between languages

- We can learn additional languages

- If we don't have a particular word for a concept, we can express the concept with a string of words

- Some psychologists have suggested that speakers of gender-marking languages think about objects as being gendered
 - In Spanish the word "bridge" is masculine (*el puente*), and Spanish speakers described a bridge with masculine adjectives such as *big*, *dangerous*, *long*, *strong*, and *sturdy*
 - -In German, the word "bridge" is feminine (*die Brücke*) and German speakers described a bridge with feminine adjectives such as *beautiful*, *elegant*, *fragile*, *pretty*, and *slender*
- This evidence seems to support a weak version of linguistic relativism

QUiZ

- 1. The word "monkey" has no relationship with the animal monkey in the world. This is known as:
- A. Productivity
- B. Rapid fade
- C. Arbitrariness
- D. Displacement
- E. Duality

2.____ refers to the words such as click, meow, and tick tack, which sound similar to the noises they describe.

- A. Lateralization
- B. Onomatopoeia
- C. Pharynx
- D. The genetic source
- E. Larynx

- **3.** The linguistic form or sound of "horse" has no relationship with the animal horse in the real world. This is known as _____.
- A. Displacement
- B. Duality
- C. Productivity
- D. Cultural transmission
- E. Arbitrariness

- **4.** According to Chomsky ______.
- A. Language is learned.
- B. Language is not necessarily a human-specific capacity.
- C. Human beings learn language through repetition
- D. Language acquisition stems from the interaction of general cognitive capacities
- E. Human beings are born with language-specific knowledge

- 5. _____ explains how it is possible for you to speak and understand and make judgments about well-formed, and it tells what you know about the sounds, words, phrases, and sentences of your language.
- A. Descriptive Grammar
- **B.** Prescriptive Grammar
- C. Teaching Grammar
- D.Universal Grammar

6. _____ is the set of structural rules governing the composition of clauses phrases and words in any given natural language.

- A. Grammar
- B. Morpheme
- C. Linguistic
- D.Phonology

- 7. According to Lowth, '_____ makes _____.'
- A. Two positives, a negative
- B. Two negatives, a positive

- **8.**_____ is what we know about a language.
- A. Linguistic Performance
- **B.** Standard Dialect
- C. Linguistic
- D. Linguistic Competence

9. Which of the following is not the feature of Universal Grammar?

- A. Part of a biologically endowed human language faculty.
- B. The basic blueprint that all languages follow.
- C. Regional forms or forms restricted to group class are frowned upon.
- D. It refers to the universal properties that all languages share.

10. Which of the following is a property of language which states that human language enables individuals to talk about other places and times?

A) Duality

B) Productivity

C) Discreteness

D) Creativity

E) Displacement

(ÖABT-2013)

11. Which one of the followinf is a fact about the development of human language?

- A) Spoken language precedes the written language.
- B) Language was born in the courting days of mankind.
- C) God gave the language to humans.
- D) It was the sound of nature that inspired humans to build a language.
- E) Humans developed language due to commercial reason.

12. Animals can produce a limited number of sounds; while human beings produce many different words. The property oh human language is known as

A) productivity

B) arbitrariness

C) duality

D) reflexiveness

E) displacement

13. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf believed that:

- **A)** There are distinct colors in nature like red and green
- **B**) We see the real world only in the categories of our language
- **C**) All normal humans share the capability of having essentially the same sense perceptions of color.
- **D**) None of the above

14. What is the linguistic determinism?

- **A**) The idea that we can only think in the categories provide by our language.
- **B**) The set of other words used in the same phrase and sentence
- **C**) The study of language variation based on where different varieties of the language are used

15. Linguistic determinism holds that

- **A)** The language we speak determines how we perceive and think about the world
- **B**) Languages do not differ in how they Express locations
- **C**) Language does not show linguistic distinctions in their lexion.

16. Which one of the following expressions are not true?

- **A)** People's thoughts and perceptions and structures of their language.
- **B**) The Hopi language may have words and word endings for specific tenses
- **C**) In Nahavo blue and green are one word.
- **D**) Language is the ability acquire and use complex systems of communication.

THANKS FOR YOUR PATIENCE... ©

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