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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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At the end of this unit, learners would be able;

- to explain evolution of language and discuss it intelligibly,
- to understand the definitions of language and outline the features characterizing it in detail,
- to examine the meaning of meaning and elaborate on some of the different kinds of meaning,
- to comprehend the nature and properties of language and discuss them at length.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Modern linguists define linguistics as ‘the scientific study of language’ ever since the mid–19th century to differentiate it from philology. The phrase ‘the scientific study of language’ would imply that scientific principles operate in the study of language. There are three basic principles of science.

- Empiricism** : The practice of depending on observation and experiment, especially in the natural sciences.
- Rationalism** : The practice of laying emphasis on reason and experience as the necessary criteria for solving problems, and
- Scepticism** : The practice of having reservations or doubt generally or specifically toward a given object of study.

Linguistics is a ‘social science’, not a ‘natural science’, as David Crystal argued convincingly in a report he submitted to the Social Sciences Research Council, UK in 1968. We can no longer insist on empiricism, marked feature in the natural sciences. Therefore, we can only insist on linguistics following rationalism and scepticism as the basic principles. This Unit is not on Linguistics as such but on the evolution of language, definition, meaning and nature of language. Therefore, we shall begin with a discussion on the evolution of language.

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## 1.2 EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

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### 1.2.1 Definition :

Evolution is a scientific theory that seeks to demonstrate how new species appear from their pre–existing form over time in a variety of ways through the process of natural selection, genetic mutation or drift, and hybridization.1 Language is the vehicle of human thought processes, which facilitate communication. Karl von Frisch's research on the ‘language’ of bees in the 1940s created doubts about the idea that the facility of language for communication was primarily human, but it could not lead to the dismissal of the idea. The story of the evolution of language in this context makes for interesting reading. The first cries of a baby at birth communicates the news of its arrival into a world of uncertainties from the safety of his/ her mother's womb.

Linguists, who have researched extensively on ‘language evolution’ as it is known scientifically, have noted with a note of regret that this is a topic of study on which very little research is available. Even the research that is available on the topic is nothing more than speculation and thus questionable on scientific grounds. The reason is that language is primarily speech, or oral in its origins. Its written version took a lot of time to develop.

We will begin with a short discussion on a very well received research paper by Steven Pinker and Paul Bloom in 1990 titled “Natural language and natural selection”. They initiate the argument by observing how each of us as human beings are skilled users of language without any reference to the intelligence, social status, or level of education of each of us. Our children acquire language easily and in time develop the ability to use ‘complex grammatical sentences’ even if they had no formal education. More surprising is the fact that they can use language structures to which they have had no exposure. The ease with which they do it conforming to ‘the subtle grammatical principles’ of grammar. The greatest of all surprises is that this may have nothing to do with the environment around them. Pinker and Bloom feel that this has to do with biological make-up of human beings than anything else. This way they relate it to Darwin's thesis of natural selection.

In his book, *The Language Instinct : The New Science of Language and Mind*, Steven Pinker (1994) begins by laying stress on language as ‘an instinct to acquire an art’. He explains that human beings belong to ‘a species with a remarkable ability : we can shape events in each other's brains with exquisite precision’ due to their ability to use language. Human beings use language to communicate with each other. They share ideas using their ability to speak. It is through this language ability, consisting of its four major skills : listening, speaking, reading and writing that we are able to bridge ‘gaps of time, space, and acquaintanceship’. Non-verbal communication enjoys primacy over writing, as research on communication reveals, for 93 per cent of our communication is non-verbal in nature according to Albert Mehrabian (1971), with speaker's body language accounting for 55 per cent and tone and prosodic elements 38 per cent. The difficulty is that we do not know, even now, about how oral language use evolved.

The question we have before us now is how, then, do we understand and explain how language evolved in its oral form. Pinker argues that when we think of language ‘as an instinct’ we defy all that we know and perhaps, even invert it. It becomes what he calls ‘a biological adaptation to communicate information’ rather than being a product of ‘human uniqueness’. He attributes to Darwin ‘the conception of language as a kind of instinct’, which he ‘first articulated in 1871’.

In their well-written introduction to a book Givón and Malle edited in 2002 titled *The Evolution of Human Language out of Pre-language* in which they point out these difficulties. They argue that ‘language evolution has been an intellectual orphan in linguistics’, largely due to deep-set prejudices in its epistemology. This has helped create a rigid boundary ‘between the ‘biological and the cultural’, ‘the genetic and the learned’ etc

(p.vii). Research on biological evolution requires the study of fossils, which would not help us uncover anything how language originated in its spoken variant. The fossils and the evidence collected by archaeologists would only help shed light on the way written form of language evolved. Yet another problem faced owes itself to tentativeness of any definition.

Our religious scriptures offer us clues to how language evolved. In discussing the evolution of the world and life on earth, the Mainstream *Indian Scriptures* note how the sound of ‘Om’ resounded in the universe at the time of creation. *The Bible* narrates how angels sang at the time of the creation. It is not certain whether this that led to Philosophers writing on the philosophy of language to talk about two approaches to language study *God's Truth vs Hocus–Pocus* in the 1950s. *God's truth* is an approach to the description of linguistic data that derives its strength from the realists’ argument that ‘universal’ terms in language have a reality of their own, prior to any physical particular and are, therefore, mere abstractions as was claimed to be the case in the nominalist school of thought. Any linguistic data description based on such a belief centres around the hypothesis that language possesses a ‘real’ structure that needs to be uncovered.

The philosophic assumption in the works of philologists seems to be that if the procedures of analysis were to be logically consistent, then one would arrive at the same description of the same data. If the results differed, then it would seem to suggest that there existed the possibility that the analyst's observation was either defective or the logic used was flawed. This approach does not appear to admit any uncertainty.

Clearly, then, the *hocus–pocus* approach does not base its assumption on God's truth but is thought to underline the need for an organisation to be imposed by a linguist on his/her data to show the kind of structural patterns that emerge as a result of this exercise. Each to his own devices is the message driven home to us. The *hocus–pocus* approach does not set up any particular method for use, leaving individual linguists to use whatever procedures they could, drawing upon their background knowledge to the approach, to analyse the data from their respective angle.

There is at least one defect in the main in doing so in that the resultant analysis could be intuitive, or procedural, or the like leading to the emergence of descriptions that are different, one from the other. The aims differ in these two approaches because the set of assumptions used by a linguist exploiting the data are different. *God's truth* is a view of language as something that has a structure underlying it and, since it is present, this is easily demonstrable. *Hocus–pocus* apparently bases itself on the premise that language does not have a readily available structure and, therefore, one needs to impose a structure on it.

Considered from a historical perspective, the evolution of language seems to have occurred over time. Language is the pivot around which researchers argued a case for the superiority of human beings over animals. Much of what we know as language today has its base in oral language use especially sounds. Lack of any direct evidence on the manner in which language evolved as a sound system, to begin with, leads us to speculate

on such an important topic. Fortunately, there is adequate research support available for evolution of language insofar as language use in writing is concerned. Linguists have been able to establish quite convincingly how writing developed as a linguistic form. The movement in development was from use of matchstick drawings to cave paintings to the use of long leaves for writing to stone engravings etc, right up to the point in time that Caxton invented the printing press.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : 1**

**1 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN NOT MORE THAN FIVE SENTENCES EACH IN YOUR OWN WORDS.**

- a. Why do you think it is difficult for linguists to prove scientifically how language evolved in speech ?
- b. What is this approach to the study of language called 'God's Truth' ? How does it proceed to explain the evolution of language ?
- c. Examine Pinker and Bloom's theory of language evolution discussed in this sub-unit. Explain your considered view on this.
- d. Read the last paragraph of this sub-unit and summarize it as well as you can.
- e. Explain the difference in 'God's Truth' vs 'Hocus-Pocus' approach to the study of language.

**2. WRITE SHORT NOTES ON THE FOLLOWING.**

- a. The Definition of Evolution
- b. The Difficulties in Explaining Language Evolution

**3. SAY WHETHER THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE TRUE OR FALSE. GIVE REASON FOR YOUR RESPONSE FOR EACH OF THEM.**

- a. Karl von Frisch's research on the 'language' of bees in the 1940s did not add to what we know about the evolution of language.
- b. From a historic perspective, it appears that the evolution of language seems to have occurred over time.
- c. We cannot accept the thesis on language as Hocus-Pocus.
- d. Language evolution is an intellectual orphan in linguistics.

**4. FILL IN THE BLANKS IN THE FOLLOWING FIVE ITEMS CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE OPTION (A, B, C, OR D) FROM THOSE GIVEN BELOW EACH OF THEM.**

1. David Crystal presented his report to the \_\_\_\_\_ in 1964.  
(A) Life Sciences Research Council, UK.  
(B) Social Sciences Research Council, UK.  
(C) Natural Sciences Research Council, UK.  
(D) Applied Sciences Research Council, UK.

2. The research available on the topic of language evolution is questionable on scientific grounds because \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(A) it is sparse and unreliable.  
(B) written language precedes oral variety.  
(C) language is ultimately the product of human mind.  
(D) language is primarily speech, or oral in its origins.
3. Stephen Pinker attributes to Darwin the conception of \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(A) language as a kind of 'instinct'.  
(B) language as 'an instinct to acquire an art'.  
(C) language as a set of codes and conventions.  
(D) language as purely human convention.
4. Non-verbal communication amounts to \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(A) 36 per cent of our total communication.  
(B) 63 per cent of our total communication.  
(C) 39 per cent of our total communication.  
(D) 93 per cent of our total communication.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is a view of language as something that has a structure underlying it.  
(A) Truth (B) Hocus-Pocus  
(C) God' Truth (D) Reality

**Answers to Task-3**

- a. **True** : Karl von Frisch's research on the 'language' of bees in the 1940s created doubts about the idea that the faculty of language for communication was primarily human, but it could not lead to the dismissal of the idea.
- b. **True** : Considered from a historical perspective, the evolution of language seems to have occurred over time.
- c. **False** : The *hocus-pocus* is thought to underline the need for an organisation to be imposed by a linguist on his/her data to show the kind of structural patterns that emerge as a result of this exercise.
- d. **True** : It is so largely due to deep-set prejudices in its epistemology.

**Answers to Task 4**

1. (B)      2. (C)      3. (A)      4. (D)      5. (C)

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### 1.3 DEFINITIONS OF LANGUAGE

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**Introduction :**

We shall discuss the definitions of language by Aristotle, Sapir, Whatmough, Robins, and Chomsky in order to trace the development of thought down to recent times.

### **1.3.1 Aristotle :**

Aristotle seems to use the term “speech” metonymically to imply that language is speech, when he defines it as “the representation of the experience of the mind.” Such an assumption would lead us to the following set of propositions : (a) speech is a representation, per se, (b) the subject of this representation is an experience/s, and (c) this experience is the product of the (human) mind. To represent something is to depict, describe or declare to be, to state facts or, better still, to symbolize.

Language does all this through using phonetic impressions, or graphetic symbols. A representation is the symbolic equivalent of the experience so symbolized. However, this representation cannot be a cent per cent approximation of the experience. We could possibly extend Aristotle's theory of imitation to language. We could then argue that this representation of the experience of the mind is only an imitation, far removed from reality. Two of the important meanings of the word ‘experience’, relevant to our discussion, are (i) long and varied observation, personal or general in nature, and (ii) anything received by the mind as sensation, perception or knowledge. Here is what Aristotle says on this. He argues that

Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken... the mental affections themselves, of which these words are primarily signs, are the same for the whole of mankind as are also the objects of which those affections are representations or likenesses, images, copies. (H P Cook's translation cited by Harris and Taylor 1989, 21)

Putting these two together, it should be possible for us to rephrase Aristotle's definition to read as follows : Language is the symbolic equivalent of sensations, perception or knowledge, received or projected by the mind, which is a reservoir of knowledge gained through long and varied, personal or general, observation due to the (human) capacity to think, understand, intend, and act. Surely, this is a mentalistic view of language and it is clear that Chomskyan thesis of the ‘human essence’ or ‘the distinctive qualities of the mind, derives from some such a position.

‘Knowledge’ is the product of a system of substitutions involving sensations and images (i.e., products of experiences), whereas ‘thought’ is shaped by the object in question and its context. We need to bear in mind the fact that it is the object, which is always at the heart of an experience or a set of experiences, no matter whether this object is concrete or abstract. The detachment from experience to idea is something that we call imagination. Since we have focused our discussion largely on language, we shall rest our argument here itself.

Investigations on language gathered momentum in the beginning of 20th century due largely to the unnerving inventions and discoveries in the main and the two world wars we fought. World War I (1914–1918) triggered off inquiries into the nature of communication and language. No wonder, then, that there were studies on language like Edward Sapir's work *Language* published immediately thereafter in 1921, which made an important contribution to the study of language.

### 1.3.2 Edward Sapir :

Sapir defines language as ‘a purely human and non–instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.’ There is a marked stress on ‘method’ and ‘system’ in the definition but the focus of attention is the process of ‘communication’. The word, communication, derived from *communis* in Latin, incorporates the idea of sharing. What we usually communicate is only a representation of an idea, which has its origin in creation. The object, as it were, is the source of the idea that, in turn, becomes the source for the creation in the worldly sense.

Scholars argue that there is correspondence, equivalence and analogousness that exists between the object and the ideas it evokes on the one hand, and between the idea and its representation on the other. However, such correspondence, equivalence and analogousness is subject to the limitations imposed by a spatio–temporal reality. Thus, perfection cannot be achieved.

Returning to Sapir's definition, we find four ideas in the main in it. One, language is human. It is so primarily because it is the product of his mind, which enables human beings to know, understand, think, intend, and act. Two, language use is indeed an action, based as it is on thought. Thought is conditioned by our perception and understanding of reality. Understanding presupposes knowledge. The gift of intellect enables human beings to analyse and comprehend everything they perceive through their senses.

Although it is human, language is non–instinctive in nature. It employs a non–instinctive method of communication using voluntarily produced symbols. In calling language ‘human’, Sapir, perhaps unintentionally, ruled out communication systems other than those used by human beings as *Language*. Thus, he added to his definition the basic premise that language learning is non–instinctive in nature.

Let us look at a real–life example. Two patients were for their appointment with the dentist, when her beautiful receptionist called out to one of them, non–native student, who was also waiting for his turn at the surgery. She looked at him smilingly and said, “Would you like to see the dentist now ?” There was an awkward silence before the young man looked at her and said very nervously, “No, thank you, nurse. I will wait for my turn.” The nurse frowned. She did not know how to handle this. However, she soon overcame the feelings, and without any show of emotion, she said, “It is your turn to see the dentist now”.

This piece of discourse is illustrative of the problems faced in the learning of English as a foreign/link language. One thing is evidently clear here. Either the young man lacked basic knowledge of the notions and functions in English, thus found it difficult to understand the receptionist. Alternatively, the nurse's tone/tenor in asking him to see the dentist was not a part of his experience of language use. Our conclusion would not have been any different even if we did not know the context. Anything can go wrong at any of the levels of understanding, thought, intention, or action.



A native speaker would have responded with a polite ‘Thank you’ and would have moved on to the surgery to see the dentist.

Communication presupposes a shared knowledge of language implying a shared cultural context as well. We need to learn a language, for we are not born with it. We acquire it through imitation/repetition and begin using it creatively after we have mastered the basic structures. An ‘instinct’ implies an innate – native, natural, inborn, or inherent – character. This goes to prove that it is non–instinctive, unlike the expression of pain, anger, surprise etc. There is inadequate research support available to confirm that it may be non–instinctual even if Chomsky's (1965) innateness hypothesis was very popular at some point in time.

McKeachie and Doyle (1966) point out how ‘unlearned connections’ facilitate intricate reactions to a complicated series of stimuli ‘in lower animals’. They argue that these are ‘dependent to a large extent on built–in circuitry’, which they identify as ‘instincts’. They suggest the use of criteria for investigators to follow in order to identify ‘a pattern of behaviour as an instinct’. (1), every member of a species typically shows particular fixed sequence of behaviour in an appropriate situation; (2) the behaviour is performed adequately the first time, and (3) the behaviour differs from a reflex. They illustrate this by citing the examples of mating rituals and maternal behaviour as common instances of instinctive behaviour. Instinct is in this way quite psychobiological in nature. Thus, it refers to an animal's innate ability or tendency to act in ways essential to its development and preservation. These are a part of what is innate. They do not require any learning.

Sapir's observation about language being a non–instinctive method of communication. This is borne out by revelations found when we apply the McKeachie and Doyle criteria to identify instinctive behaviour. Communication involves two types of behaviour : intensive and interpretative on the part of the speaker and listener or reader and writer respectively. Since it is intensive, it has an aim, and an intent, which makes it purposeful.

The use of language implies intentionality. Words, which help us create meaning, are signals, and all signals denote or connote something. Negotiation of meaning necessitates the comprehension of what those words/signals indicate which, in turn, makes it possible for people to make reasoned judgements about their associative and emotive implications. Let us take up the next definition of language.

### **1.3.3 Joshua Whatmough :**

In his book also titled *Language*, Joshua Whatmough defines language as “human... a verbal systematic symbolism... a means of transmitting information... a form of social behaviour... (with a) high degree of convention.” This definition has a wording that reveals a patchwork. This is so because it is a summary of several long paragraphs. It is not very popular with scholars and researchers working on language and linguistics due to this reason. The elements common to this definition and that of Sapir's are the terms ‘human’, ‘symbols’, and ‘symbolism’. There is no point in repeating what we have said earlier about language being a human

institution. Therefore, we shall focus our attention on the phrase ‘a verbal systematic symbolism’.

‘Verbal’ has two clear meanings in the main : (i) of or pertaining to and derived from a verb or verbs, and (ii) of, or in the nature of, or concerned with, or in the matter of words or words rather than things. We would like to believe that both these meanings are involved in the use of that adjective. In referring to a verb or verbs, it refers to action/s. When we perform a function in language, we perform an action. The mention of words denoting things is one of dealing with their denotative and connotative references. These actions and the words used to denote them are ‘systematic’ in nature.

Language, notes Whatmough, is ‘a means of transmitting information’. He implies, of course, that there are means of transmission of information other than language. He also implies that language is a tool of communication. We have dealt with this in detail earlier and find no need for repetition. However, we shall discuss the process of transmission. Transmission is the act or process of transmitting, such as the sending of electromagnetic waves from a transmitter to a receiver. To transmit is to pass on, send or communicate. For Whatmough, language is a means of transmitting information. We know that information is knowledge communicated or received, and to inform is to tell someone something about a particular thing or on a definite topic, or to provide important details on a given subject, person etc.

The *articulate mammal*, as Aitchison (1978) calls fellow humans, transmits bits and pieces of information on different topics of discourse using a complex system of signs and symbols to encode and decode messages. These messages are signals, either in the phonemic or graphemic forms, whose substance is, therefore, phonic or graphic in nature. A piece of discourse uses sounds and sequences of sounds whereas a text uses orthographic medium. Sounds and their graphetic equivalents are open to manipulation and, thus, a variety of interpretations.

Tonal fluctuations of the speaker, stress patterns, and paralinguistic features including facial expressions that indicate its underlying meaning mark our speech conveying a message. A listener who does not have the advantage of being on the spot is more than likely to process the wording of a message. The text of a message is easier to process because the text in print is bound to have contextual clues built into its structure and organisation.

Language is, in this way, context-dependent and context-sensitive, more so because, in the words of Whatmough, it is ‘a form of social behaviour’. We need the knowledge of language in order to assert our existence as an important part of the speech community. One does not need language use in its verbal manifestation when the effort is to communicate with ourselves. Nature has doubly blessed us as human beings, for it has gifted us with both the intellect and the ability to use language.

Our intellect allows us to think and benefit from what psychologists have often called ‘ideational fluency’. Our minds are like beehives of ideational activity and thus it is difficult to comprehend what might be going on there before, at the relevant point of time, during, and even after the

communicative event. This is the most important reason why communication is unpredictable. Since language is a verbal behaviour, its significance which is clearly social in nature.

We define *behaviour* as an organism's response to a stimulus or a set of stimuli. The stimulus for verbal behaviour lies in the need for and context of such behaviour. We would not respond to a situation (as a stimulus) unless we feel the need to do so and can find the appropriate context for our response. Language is bound to the culture of the people, i.e., to the race that produces it. It is only natural, then, that it would be culture-specific.

Imagine that you are on a visit to the UK. A native speaker of English greets you and tries to engage you in a conversation – something quite unlikely to happen unless it is unavoidable. The utterance he/she would use would be, “It is a lovely morning, isn't it ?” Now, if you were to respond with a quizzical look, “Yes, it is better than yesterday”, then he/she would immediately make out that you are a foreigner in his/her country. Even if you were to look very English by the colour of your skin and other features. The response pattern holds the clue to enable the native speaker to identify your non-native origin.

When we use language as a form of social behaviour, we do so consciously, for language derives its existence from the society, which nurtures and sustains it. Communication is the greatest need of a human being, ranked easily after food. The human need to belong, to experience companionship provides us with the stimulus for communication. This need links with our survival in a social set-up. We need to appreciate that any form of social behaviour has a high degree of convention.

Language use follows a specific variety of norms of social convention. Conventions govern all aspects of social life, be it the courtroom of a judge, the consulting room of a physician or surgeon, the chamber of the head of an organisation, or even our own drawing rooms where it is in evidence. Social convention governs the use of language. “I would like you to do this” is certainly a better option than the authoritative “I want you to do this”. A request or a polite but firm statement fetches a favourable response when compared to other options indicating power and authority.

Convention offers a protective shielding which deviation/s from norms of social behaviour would disallow us. We cannot use English the way we because that would be difficult to accept. You cannot respond to the “How do you do ?” of a stranger with “I am fine. Thank you” because that is not the convention. “Would you like to see the dentist now ?” is not a question but a request, a suggestion about what the speaker thinks/believes. It would be a linguistic mess if we were to respond with a cool “No, thank you; I will wait for my turn.” A serious lack of understanding of the cultural implications is clearly marked in embarrassing interactions of this kind.

We have often found letters with the complimentary close : “Looking forward to hearing from you”, or “... to meeting you”, or “...to seeing you”. Teachers of English have often had to explain the unusual combination of ‘to’ and the present participle form of the verb to their inquisitive learners.

No communicative grammar would give you a satisfactory response to the query why this actually happens. We would need to fall back upon the conventions of language use to explain a phenomenon of that kind. Never mind if it sounds arbitrary, for arbitrariness is an important feature characterising a language. Let us now take up R H Robin's definition of language.

#### **1.3.4 R H Robins :**

Robins defines language as “a symbol system ... based on pure or arbitrary convention ... infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers” (*General Linguistics : An Introductory Survey*, 1971). Again a patchwork of a definition! It makes five main observations about language. (1) Language is a symbol system. (2) Pure or arbitrary convention governs language. (3) Language is infinitely extendable and modifiable. (4) The changing needs of the speakers govern the infinite extensions and modifications. (5) The conditions of use are the determinants of these extensions and modifications, besides needs. Language is a need-based social product, a creation of the human mind. Since it is not individual in its origin and orientation, it draws its sustenance from social convention.

The basic proposition in Robins' thesis is that language is a symbol system. Robins stopped short of using the term ‘social semiotic’ used by Halliday later. Robins finds the study of semiotics to be something that does not form a part of general linguistics, but Halliday accorded it an important place in his theoretical discussion on language as a social semiotic. Semiotics is the science of signs which has three major divisions : (a) semantics (a branch studying ‘the signification of signs’), (b) syntactics (a branch studying ‘the way in which signs of various classes’ – ie word classes – ‘are combined to form compound signs’), and (c) pragmatics (a branch studying ‘the origin, the uses, and the effects of signs’). Morris (1955) had pointed out that ‘semiotic’ is ‘the science of signs’ with ‘semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics’ as ‘its main divisions’. One might wonder how this relates to symbols. Morris explains that a symbol is ‘a sign that is produced by its interpreter and that acts as a substitute for some other sign with which it is synonymous.’ All signs, but not all symbols, are signals because a sign, unlike a symbol, is not a substitute for some other sign with which it is synonymous.

When we claim that language is a signalling system, we actually refer to signs and not symbols. However, when we claim that language is a symbol system, we are not focusing singularly on symbols as symbols but on those of them that are signs, for only signs are signals. Shedding light on the essential difference between signs and symbols, Robins observes that whereas ‘signs in general are events or things that in some way direct our attention to, or are indicative of, other events or things ... symbols are a special class of signs’ that are called ‘conventional signs’ (see p.12). Signs are indeed signals, as is popularly accepted. Thus, we would have ‘acoustic’, ‘ideographic’, or ‘graphic’ signals in speech and writing respectively. The disturbances caused in the air as a result of articulation and the marks made on a piece of paper or any other flat surface as a representation of that

articulation are the two media in the main of language in action. Both these are the products of the human mind of language as a social semiotic.

We shall return to Robins' statement that pure or arbitrary convention governs language and examine it. A 'convention' is any accepted rule or practice, especially in social behaviour. Conventions are known to have contributed both to the creation of languages and in adding to the complexities which have governed their development. Social behaviour is the central plank of any discussion on language. We have already argued how language that makes for interaction between members of a speech community allows them to make informed judgements about the motivations governing the patterns of their behaviour.

It is indeed true that language is a part of the cultural ethos of a people who use it, and the history of human civilisations acknowledges that it is one of the most important factors binding them together. The history of independent India of the sixties stands testimony to the way in which people have managed to forge unity on this issue despite the apparently insurmountable differences that have divided them and provoked language riots in the late 50s and the 60s of the last century. The articulate mammal uses language to make friends and influence people.

We need answers to two queries straightaway : (a) what does 'pure' convention mean ? (b) How is language the product of 'arbitrary' convention ? The use of the adjective 'pure' to qualify the noun 'convention' seems to make 'pure convention' analogous with the import of a phrase like 'pure sciences'. 'Pure' has as its synonyms, words like theoretical, abstract, hypothetical, conjectural, speculative, fundamental, or basic. The dictionary meanings of these words seem to suggest that we can easily put them under two broad categories of those concerned with concepts of (i) assumption and tentativeness and, therefore, inadequacy, and

(ii) totality and completeness, or of necessity. We can see a dyadic relationship here that is contradictory in nature. This is something that contributes to the inherent confusion in our understanding of the term 'pure'.

We shall reverse the order of the categorisation above in order to reflect upon this feature. We consider anything that is 'pure' as being fundamental or basic in the sense we have it used here. 'Fundamental' is suggestive of something that is a prerequisite and, therefore, indispensable, and, used in a philosophical context, it means more formal and more natural. 'Basic' may not suggest what is necessary, but also what is acceptable as standard. The other category represents features that constitute a theoretical formulation, which is speculative in nature. Nothing theoretical may be practical for at least one important reason that it is as a hypothesis, it offers only a provisional explanation, which we need to prove or disprove with reference to facts.

A theory is an abstraction, and so is language an abstraction as a theoretical construct. It has existence only as a mental concept denoting a quality or certain qualities of a thing apart from the thing it refers. Since it is conjectural in nature, it relates closely to guess work and this way stresses the incompleteness or inadequacy of the various pieces of evidence

serving as the basis of judgement. We need to sum up what we mean by 'pure convention' by putting all this together. We should now be able to say that 'pure convention' is a phrase referring to a generally accepted rule or practice based on a standard, fixed as true, until such time as the theory or some important part of it is falsified. Pure convention is a reference to a standard fixed provisionally and, therefore, remains open all the time to further speculation, or scientific investigation.

Language has arbitrary convention as based on, primarily because the standard against which we measure the level of *usage* and *use* is subjective largely. Although we aim our observations at being as objective as possible, the element of subjectivity built into our speculative inquiry makes it a suspect in the eyes of the readers. It is absolute, not in the sense of being complete or perfect, but in the sense of not being dependent on, or in when seen in comparison with other languages.

Robins argues that 'language is infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers.' Language is need-based and the changing needs and conditions of the speakers govern the changes in language. Undoubtedly, users do this done to match the demands of the speech community. Language is infinitely extendable in the sense that it is productive in nature. What is productive is usually responsible for making things that satisfy needs. Language, in being infinitely extendable and modifiable, provides us with the proof of its natural capacity to allow changes and extensions keeping in tune with the demands of the situation from time to time. A language user can go on making changes in the structure and meaning of his/her utterances by adding to what he/she or someone else has said. This way, he/she modifies them.

Extensions are possible due to the inclusion or addition of more and more of information on a given subject. Take, for example, a simple sentence like 'Birds fly'. We can extend this *ad infinitum*, though within certain well-defined limits, to make provision for economy of expression, and keeping it so in order to facilitate its meaningful processing. We can extend the sentence in some select ways as follows. (A) Birds fly. (B) Birds fly in the sky. (C) Birds fly in the sky and over the land. (D) Birds fly over the land and migrate to other places. (E) Smaller birds are believed to fly faster than the larger ones. (F) Smaller birds fly from one tree to another to avoid attacks and possible killing by larger birds etc.

We can also make modifications this way since our creative urge, thus, facilitating refinement necessitate these. Take, for example, a sentence like 'The man is standing'. We can modify this as follows. (i) The man, who is standing there, is my wonderful neighbour.

(ii) The man sporting jeans and a pullover, standing there, is a very dear friend of mine, is believed to be a spoilt genius. (iii) The man, who is standing there, claims to be an expert freelancing on several subjects that he neither knows, nor does anyone recognise him as knowing. Since extensions and modifications are different from a technical point of view, people may accept them as being dissimilar. However, they are not so in practice, for both these properties of language are interrelated and interdependent

in many ways. It is the creative element, our creativity, which prevents us from becoming wholly mechanical in our productive role. Chomskyan linguistics apparently offers such an explanation.

### **1.3.5 Noam Chomsky :**

Chomsky (1968) makes a very interesting observation about language. He notes that ‘when we study human language, we are approaching what some might call *human* essence, the distinctive qualities of mind that are, as far as we know, unique to man.’ His argument is that the study of human language leads us to what he calls the ‘human essence’ or the distinctive qualities of mind. Mind is the essence that enables human beings to feel, and emote. Thus, it makes it possible for them to respond to stimuli such as sensations, perceptions, dispositions, moods, physical, and intellectual activities that their cognition strengthens.

Knowledge, thought, understanding, purpose, and action are the distinctive qualities of mind. Knowledge, as we know, is a system of substitutions of sensations and images. Sensation is the feeling produced by the stimulation of any sense organ, or of the mind. Image is usually in the likeness of the object of perception and cognition or the mental picture of a given object. The sensation, along with the mental picture it evokes, leads to an experience, which, in turn, evokes a thought. This creates a chain of a sensation plus a mental picture that provide the trigger for a thought. All this forms the basis of knowledge.

A thought consists of an object of cognition and its context. Objects perceived through sense organs are the targets at which we direct an action or a particular feeling. Mentalists of Chomskyan persuasion add to the five senses, a sixth one, i.e., intuition, putting the study and use of language firmly within the scope of psychology. Sense perception and sense experience are goal-directed. Thus, we direct the action or feeling toward the goal, which is the object of cognition defining its meaning.

We establish logical relations through deductive or inductive procedures, drawing suitable inferences. This is what finally informs the process involved in understanding. All of this is a part of what essentially constitutes the initial stages in the formation and comprehension of concepts. Understanding is the discovery of meaning, which is evident in language use shaped by purpose. Anything that is goal-directed is purposeful. Intention and effort define our purpose and so does choice.

Once we have drawn upon the twin areas of knowledge : of the world, and of language, our thoughts allow us to make suitable inferences in the fulfilment of our purpose, which manifests itself in the form of action. Action is behaviour, for it is in response to a stimulus or a set of stimuli. Language is action, for Skinner (1957) refers to it as verbal behaviour. However, there may not be any verbal behaviour in evidence, and action or behaviour. In such cases, one can understand by using other kinds of support including reactions involving long stretches of silence in a communicative event. This is quite challenging because it uses paralinguistic features.

Waldron (1985) apparently has the Chomskyan thesis in mind in observing that ‘words are themselves perceptible, like many things with which they are associated. But they only have meaning insofar as they are interpreted and understood.’ The act of interpretation involves showing, clarifying or explaining the meaning of something available to us for elucidation. Interpretation is always dependent on context.

This is in affirmation of Waldron's explanation that ‘the central function of human language’ is ‘the *manner* in which it *mediates* between *sense experience* and *conceptual thought*’ (his emphasis). The focus is on ‘the manner’ of the mediation (intervention between conflicting parties to promote reconciliation, settlement, or compromise) and, of course, the process of doing so. The central function of language, in other words, is to show how it can, and does indeed, bring about an agreement between ‘sense experience’ on the one hand and ‘conceptual thought’ on the other.

Sense and experience are interrelated much in the same way as concept and thought are interrelated. Sense is related to perception made possible by the faculties of taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing and, in this way, it is the feeling generated by perception. We take experience as any event or circumstance that one has experienced through direct encounter or observation. It is instructive in the sense that one gains knowledge from it. Experiences lead to better perception of things.

Concept is a reference to an idea, especially of the kind generalised from various instances or observations. Generalisation is the process of drawing a general conclusion from one or more particular cases. We base conclusions on inferences drawn by using the method of deduction or induction. Thought is the act, or process, or the result of thinking. To think is to use our mind to form an idea, judgement etc, and we know that an idea is something conceived as a part or result of thought.

Idea and thought are terms often confused to be the same though they are not. Idea is quite a general term ‘applicable to almost any part or aspect of mental activity’ and a thought is ‘an idea based on intellectual activity’ and is, in no way, ‘directly attributable to a sense impression’. In a strictly technical sense, our mind and intellect are not the same because the intellect is the product of the mind. A reference to mind is actually a reference to the most general and the most neutral of the mental abilities that include comprehension, analysis, and inquiry.

Let us attempt to put together the various concepts we have been examining all this time. Sense is the feeling generated by perception and experience, which is the product of direct encounter or observation of any event or circumstance, is useful in strengthening and improving our understanding of concepts. Concepts are generalised ideas pulled out of various instances and observation.

A thought is the act, process, or the product of thinking. It is an idea, which employs intellectual abilities because, as a term, it is almost any part or aspect of mental activity. A thought is a unit consisting of several ideas that go into its making. Hence, when we consider the central function of language to be the manner in which it mediates between sense experience



and conceptual thought, we are actually arguing that language is a sort of a catalyst that reconciles experience, which is the product of sense; and thought, which is conceptual in nature. This way, language helps relate experience and thought. If experience leads to thought, then the thought provides the stimulus for another experience in a cyclical process.

Thinking is the function of the human mind, which enables human beings to comprehend the knowledge of the world using their knowledge of language. Comprehension, or understanding, based on the misconceived notion that the two concepts are synonymous, involves an analysis of thought of the same kind we have been using in this sub-unit.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

**1. ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN NOT MORE THAN FIVE SENTENCES EACH IN YOUR OWN WORDS.**

- a. Comment on the statement : “language is not only used for communication but also for self-realisation”, giving reasons for your reactions.
- b. We often use the term ‘speech’ as a substitute for ‘language’. Why do you think this happens ?
- c. Examine Pyles and Algeo's (1982) remark that “To be human is to use language and to talk is to be a person.”
- d. Show how thought and language are connected.
- e. Differentiate between human language and animal communication made by Verma and Krishnaswamy (1989), and show how it is useful in our scheme of things ?
- f. Compare Aristotle's definition with that of Chomsky's and explain the features the two have in common.
- g. We find that language is ‘unique to man’. List the views of theorists quoted in the text on this belief.
- h. Discuss the interrelationship that exists between and among concepts like knowledge, thought, understanding, purpose, and action.
- i. List the ideas on language that come to your mind after reading the Unit, and write an essay showing how these can be meaningfully connected one with the other.

**2. WRITE SHORT NOTES ON THE FOLLOWING.**

- A. Human essence is unique to man.
- B. Relation between Sense and Experience.
- C. McKeachie and Doyle's Argument
- D. The Non-instinctive Nature of Language
- E. Paralinguistic Features of Language

**3. SAY WHETHER THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE TRUE OR FALSE. GIVE REASON FOR YOUR RESPONSE FOR EACH OF THEM.**

- A. We establish logical relations through deductive or inductive procedures.
- B. Extensions in language are possible without any inclusion of information.

- C. Language, like theory, is an abstraction as a theoretical construct.
- D. Robins finds the study of semiotics to be something that does not form a part of general linguistics.
- E. Aitcheson (1978) use of the phrase ‘the articulate mammal’ is a reference to human beings.

**4. FILL IN THE BLANKS IN THE FOLLOWING FIVE ITEMS CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE OPTION (A, B, C, OR D) FROM THOSE GIVEN BELOW EACH OF THEM.**

- 1. Aristotle seems to use the term “speech” metonymically \_\_\_\_\_, when he defines it as “the representation of the experience of the mind.”
  - (A) to imply that language could be speech
  - (B) to imply that language is speech
  - (C) to imply that speech is written language
  - (D) to imply that language may be speech
- 2. ‘Knowledge’ is the product of a system of substitutions involving \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - (A) images and symbols                      (B) symbols and images
  - (C) sensations and images                  (D) images and sensations
- 3. Communication presupposes \_\_\_\_\_ implying a shared cultural context as well.
  - (A) a shared knowledge of language
  - (B) knowledge of language
  - (C) a shared acquisition of language
  - (D) acquisition of language
- 4. Tonal fluctuations of the speaker, stress patterns, and paralinguistic features including \_\_\_\_\_ that indicate its underlying meaning mark our speech conveying a message.
  - (A) parametric features                      (B) graphitic symbols
  - (C) phonemic signals                          (D) facial expressions
- 5. A branch of language studying ‘the way in which signs of various classes’ like word classes ‘are combined to form compound signs’ is called \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - (A) pragmatics   (B) semiotics   (C) syntactics   (D) phonetics

**Answers to Task 3**

- a. **True** : We establish logical relations through deductive or inductive procedures, drawing suitable inferences.
- b. **False** : Extensions are possible due to the inclusion or addition of more and more of information on a given subject.
- c. **True** : Robins finds the study of semiotics to be something that does not form a part of general linguistics.

- d. **True** : A theory is an abstraction, and so is language an abstraction as a theoretical construct.
- e. **True** : The *articulate mammal*, as Aitcheson (1978) calls fellow humans, transmits bits and pieces of information on different topics of discourse using a complex system of signs and symbols to encode and decode messages.

<b>Answers to Task 4</b>
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- |        |        |       |        |        |
|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. (B) | 2. (C) | 3. () | 4. (D) | 5. (C) |
|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|

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## 1.4 MEANING

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### Introduction

Sound, grammar and meaning are the basic components of language in a layperson's view of it. Technically, one studies the sounds of a given language using knowledge from two sciences of sound, phonology and phonetics.

*Phonology* is the science of sounds, which helps establish and describe 'the distinctive sound units of a language (phonemes) by means of distinctive features'. It studies 'word-to-word relations in sentences' by pointing out how combination of words affect the sound patterns, and helps marks out intonation patterns. *Phonetics*, on the other hand, is the science of sounds, which deals with the way in which we articulate different sounds in a given language.

Similarly, in studying grammar, one studies lexes, syntax, morphology and inflections. Lexes are words of a given language listed in the dictionary. Syntax studies how words combine with one another to form sentences and the conventions that govern sentence-formation. Morphology is a science that studies how a morpheme – the smallest meaningful and indivisible unit in a language – combines in the formation of a word. *Inflection* is the extension of a word by adding an *affix* to it or addition of *-s/-es* to it, depending on conventions of language use.

The study of meaning involves two other sciences, semantics and pragmatics. *Semantics* is the science that studies meaning. *Pragmatics*, on the other hand, is also a science of meaning. It studies how sentences are related one to the other and the contexts and situations in which we use them. In other words, pragmatics studies meaning in a social context.

Since our concern in this sub-unit is meaning, let us move to it straightaway. The meaning of the term *meaning* is what one intends to convey through as well as what one actually conveys through language use. Words on their own do not have any meaning. Look up a word in the dictionary and you will find several meanings listed there. A word gets its meaning from the context in which we use it. For, it *denotes* or indicates what we try to say, but the choices we make could make or destroy the sense we wish it to convey. *Sense* is a wonderful word as it indicates a meaning we convey or intend to convey. Technically speaking, this represents its import and signification respectively.

Words get their meaning from the context of their use. Thus, we have word meaning at one level. We use words in a chain-like formation with a subject (a noun/noun phrase/pronoun), a verb and an object (again a noun/noun phrase/complement/adverbial/pronoun) to give us a sentence. Theoretically, we have sense, reference, denotation and connotation as different aspects of meaning. Sense refers to the position a word or phrase has in terms relationships with other words in within its lexicon. Reference marks the relationship between words as well as what these represent. Denotation is the relational link between something that occurs in the real or even world, and denotative meaning is the “central” or “core” meaning of a lexeme. Connotation is the meaning evoked by a word or thing, or its implication.

In Chapter-2 of his book, *Semantics : The Study of Meaning*, Geoffrey Leech (1985) discusses seven types of meaning : conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. We shall spend some time looking at each of them.

#### **1.4.1 Conceptual Meaning :**

We also call it ‘denotative’ or ‘cognitive’ meaning sometimes. It is one of the essential features of language in terms of communication. The principle of *contrastiveness* and the principle of structure seem to be operational here. The former is operational at the phonological level, enabling us to use distinctive features to classify nouns like adult, boy etc. The latter is evident in how smaller unit get together to form larger units.

#### **1.4.2 Connotative Meaning :**

Communicative value is central in *connotative* meaning, showing how it is closer to the notion of ‘reference’. A set of criteria brings out the contrastive features in connotative meaning. Bitzer defines horse in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* as a ‘Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring... Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.’ Look at the contrastive features operational there in Bitzer's description of a horse. Leech observes that ‘connotations are apt to vary from age to age and from society to society’. He brings out the fact that there is a thin boundary between conceptual and connotative meaning.

#### **1.4.3 Social and Affective Meaning :**

*Social meaning* is what our language use has to convey about our social context. Language varies from region to region which is how we have dialects like Charotari dialect, Kathiyawari dialect, Surati dialect etc within Gujarati and there are different styles of use. Status also plays a major role in language use. Leech argues that social meaning could include ‘*illocutionary force* of an utterance’ like it does in case of ‘a request’, ‘an apology’, ‘a threat’, etc. *Affective meaning* has to do with emotions, where one would find a marked change in the intonation pattern. For example, ‘Don't tell me that this cannot be done.’ Or, ‘Why don't you take a break !’ Or, even, ‘Give me a break !’

#### 1.4.4 Reflected and Collocative Meaning :

*Reflected meaning* is meaning born out of our reaction to events like Bhajans, Qawwalis, Ghazals etc. There is a range of emotions that these evoke. The meaning we derive from attending such events depends on the emotions they evoke in us. Something of this kind happens when you read Milton's lines "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied ?' / I fondly ask... / They also serve who only stand and wait." A reader finds relief after a series of questions arise in response to the question, when he/she finds the protagonist of the poem "On his Blindness" has reconciled himself to the wishes of God. *Collocative meaning* takes its name and form from collocation, which is a noticeable arrangement or joining of linguistic elements such as words to attain a particular purpose, such as in the case of the phrase 'grace-abounding' in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* by John Bunyan.

#### 1.4.5 Associative Meaning :

Leech observes that 'Reflected meaning and collocative meaning, affective meaning and social meaning... have more in common with connotative meaning than with conceptual meaning'. However, he also tells us that all of them can 'be brought together under the heading of *associative meaning*'. The process operational in this case is association, which seems to be of the same kind that Eliot calls 'objective correlative'. In Eliot's own words, it is 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.' The law of association is at work in this example.

#### 1.4.6 Thematic Meaning :

*Thematic meaning*, notes Leech is 'what is communicated by the way in which a speaker or writer organizes the message, in terms of ordering, focus, and emphasis' as it happens when we transform a sentence in active voice into a passive construction. 'Meaning differs' because they are different structurally but the 'conceptual content seem to be the same.' For example, 'He was arrested last night' becomes 'The police arrested him last night'. Structurally speaking, the two sentences differ in the order of words, focus and emphasis but the content remains the same. Why 'Police' ? The police is the only agency that any government authorises to arrest a person for violations of law as a matter of principle.

#### 1.4.7 Other Meaning Relations :

We have some other meaning relations like synonym, antonymy, homonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy in the main and we shall briefly discuss these hereafter.

##### 1.4.7.1 Synonymy :

Linguistics tells us that no two words are the same though there is an element of sameness in some of them. For example, we consider smell, odour, fragrance, incense, perfume, scent, aroma etc, to name some, as synonyms. *Smell* is a general term that means odour, foul smell, especially from the armpits and socks, or even scent, especially one found in oils extracted from flowers, though it can also be that of a body. We associate

*fragrance* with flowers, *incense*, especially with religious events. *Perfume* is sweet-smelling vapour in particular. We associate *aroma* with the distinctive, pervasive, and usually pleasant or appetising smell, particularly of food.

#### **1.4.7.2 Antonymy :**

Linguistics also tells us that no two words are fully opposite though there is an element of difference in some of them. Antonymy is a mismatched relation between two words. It owes more to gradable and non-gradable words. For example, *good* has various antonyms like bad, badly, deficiently, ill, inadequately, intolerably, poor, unacceptably, and unsatisfactorily, according to *Merriam-Webster's Thesaurus*. Look up the dictionary and you will find that each of these has a different reference though there is some commonness among them. There are three main types of antonyms. *Complementary or contradictory antonyms* : bachelor/spinster, living/non-living, prepared/unprepared etc. *Relational antonyms* are word pairs wherein the existence of implies the existence of the other : above/below, supervisor/researcher, superior/subordinate, thrifty/lavish etc. *Gradable or scalar antonyms*, pairs of words differing in degrees in terms of size, height, beauty, etc : small/large, thin/fat, simple/difficult etc.

#### **1.4.7.3 Homonymy :**

Homonymy is a relationship two words belonging to the same grammatical category and spelling pronounced the same way even as their meanings and origins are different. For example, *lie*. To lie is to be or to stay at rest in a horizontal position : he was lying for some rest. To lie is to occupy a certain relative place or position : Gujarat lies to the western side of India. To lie is to have an effect through mere presence, weight, or relative position : His actions lie heavily on his conscience, which means he is remorseful. To lie is to make an untrue statement with purpose of deceiving others. To lie is to remain unused, unsought, or uncared for : The house lay unoccupied for years together. To lie is to create a false or misleading impression : Statistics are a great lie at times.

#### **1.4.7.4 Hyponymy :**

Hyponymy is a generic name that not based on a familiar species. Leech calls hyponymy 'an important structural principle in many languages with classifiers'. Hyponym is in action from the sense one gets from the relation between the predicates *man* and *human*. Thus, it is a relationship between two words, wherein the meaning of one of the words includes the meaning of the other word, such as animal and dog.

#### **1.4.7.5 Polysemy :**

Etymologically, it derives from the Greek root *polysēmos*, which consists of *poly*-(many) + *sēma* (sign). Polysemy indicates the semantic relationship between 'a word and its multiple conceptually and historically related meanings' as pointed out by Crystal, Fromkin and Rodman and some other linguists. For example 'foot' can be a reference to a part of human body, the lowest part of a mountain, a unit of measurement etc. However, these words are not interchangeable.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

**1. ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN NOT MORE THAN FIVE SENTENCES EACH IN YOUR OWN WORDS.**

- a. List the Seven Types of Meaning according to Geoffrey Leech and write at least about two of them.
- b. What is Conceptual Meaning ? How does it differ from Connotative Meaning ?
- c. Show how Social Meaning shares areas of similarity with Affective Meaning.
- d. Comment on Leech's observation that 'Reflected meaning and collocative meaning, affective meaning and social meaning... have more in common with connotative meaning than with conceptual meaning'.

**2. WRITE SHORT NOTES ON THE FOLLOWING.**

- A. Connotative Meaning
- B. Associative Meaning
- C. Thematic Meaning
- D. Antonymy

**3. SAY WHETHER THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE TRUE OR FALSE. GIVE REASON FOR YOUR RESPONSE FOR EACH OF THEM.**

- a. Polysemy indicates the semantic relationship between a word and its multiple conceptually and historically related meanings.
- b. Homonymy is not a relationship two words belonging to the same grammatical category and spelling pronounced the same way.
- c. Hyponymy is an important structural principle in many languages with classifiers.

**4. FILL IN THE BLANKS IN THE FOLLOWING FIVE ITEMS CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE OPTION (A, B, C, OR D) FROM THOSE GIVEN BELOW EACH OF THEM.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is the science of sounds, which helps establish and describe 'the distinctive sound units of a language (phonemes) by means of distinctive features'.  
(A) Phonology (B) Semiology (C) Graphology (D) Morphology
2. \_\_\_\_\_ studies how sentences are related one to the other and the contexts and situations in which we use them.  
(A) Tactilics (B) Pragmatics (C) Syntactics (D) Kinesis
3. \_\_\_\_\_ meaning is the "central" or "core" meaning of a lexeme.  
(A) Connotative (B) Affective (C) Denotative (D) Collocative
4. Communicative value is central in \_\_\_\_\_ meaning, showing how it is closer to the notion of 'reference'.  
(A) Denotative (B) Literal (C) Figurative (D) Connotative

5. \_\_\_\_\_ *meaning* has to do with emotions, where one would find a marked change in the intonation pattern.  
(A) Affective (B) Reflected (C) Social (D) Thematic

**Answers to Task 3**

- a. **True** : Polysemy indicates the semantic relationship between ‘a word and its multiple conceptually and historically related meanings’ as pointed out by Crystal, Fromkin and Rodman and some other linguists.  
b. **False** : Homonymy is a relationship two words belonging to the same grammatical category and spelling pronounced the same way even as their meanings and origins are different.  
c. **True** : Leech calls hyponymy ‘an important structural principle in many languages with classifiers’.

**Answers to Task 4**

1. (A)            2. (B)            3. (C)            4. (D)            5. (A)

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## 1.5 NATURE OF LANGUAGE

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### Introduction

Nature is a reference to the inherent character, properties or attributes of something by means of which we can identify and categorize it, especially its structure, composition, and characteristics. We have taken a close look at language, its evolution and definitions. We shall now discuss the following properties that differentiate ‘human languages’ from ‘animal noises’ as discussed in parts by Yule (1985) Verma and Krishnaswamy (1989) respectively as follows in alphabetical order :

#### 1.5.1 Arbitrariness :

The absence of any ‘natural’ or logical connection between a linguistic form and its meaning is an example of *arbitrariness*. For example, the way in which we take symbols in the form of the letters of the alphabet in English as indicating a particular sound or a group of sounds belonging to the same family of sounds defies logic.

#### 1.5.2 Creativity (vs Productivity) :

Meaning innovativeness, inventiveness, artistry, or the ability to create, which Yule refers to as *productivity*, suggesting the capacity of a language user to create, or generate mentally, and produce number of utterances that he/she might never have heard before.

Even so, technically speaking, *creativity* and *productivity* are not the same. For, the former involves the ability to do something new, using *recursiveness* – a state of recurrence, with actions or processes repeating indefinitely. This allows the formation or interpolation of sentences within sentences, thus giving rise to complexity. We understand the latter as being purely mechanical in nature.

#### 1.5.3 Culture preservation and culture transmission :

Language, which is but one of the products of culture refining us, enables humankind to reserve culture defined ‘as a way of life’ by Eliot



(1919). Words, phrases, idiomatic expressions etc are often culture-specific. Take, for instance, the Sanskrit word *ratikrida*. We treat it mistakenly as an equivalent of the English word *lovmaking* in translation.

The *krida* in the Sanskrit word means *sport* and the *making* in its English translation carries the sense of something *constructed from separate pieces*, or *manufactured*. This does not mean the same. This is true also of the English idiomatic expression *once in a blue moon*, which does not have an exact equivalent in Indian languages.

Language is, in this sense, not only *culture preserving* but also *culture transmitting* pass on a system of values, traditions etc from generation to generation. Such a context enables us to understand why the English first began to translate works from almost all the major Indian languages, and then went on compile the grammars of these languages, and produce their lexicons before making India a part of the larger British Empire. This was an effort to understand the Indian mind.

#### 1.5.4 Discreteness :

*Discreteness* is a quality of being distinct. It enables language users to distinguish, or discriminate between and among the various sounds in the sound system of a given language. For, each sound is distinct in itself like the discrete allophones /l/, /l̥/, and /l̄/ of the consonantal sound /l/; or /ə/, /æ/, and /a:/ that are discrete variants of the vowel sound /a/ in English. These are discrete in the sense that these vary one from the other.

#### 1.5.5 Displacement :

*Displacement* is a condition wherein we displace something in place of something else, or of replacing one thing with another. This is so because human language can be *context-free*. This allows a language user to refer to things or events that may be absent from the immediate settings or environment, without any stimulus controlling it directly.

#### 1.5.6 Duality :

*Duality* is representative of a state wherein we take something to be consisting of two parts. One finds good examples of duality in philosophy and theology. If there is a belief in philosophy that mind and matter exist as separate entities, then there is this belief in theology which holds that good and evil are similarly distinct states of being or principles.

We take *duality* in language and linguistics to mean the dual nature of language systems such that if there are distinctions of form and meaning, and structure and function. We see this even in the difference between form and substance, wherein substance operates at two distinct levels : phonic and graphic. In other words, this *duality* reflects itself in two different forms : one in sounds and sound combinations and the other in their symbolic representation. In phonetics and phonology, we use it to mean ‘double articulation’ of a single sound (phones) and its variants (allophones), or a single sound and a combination of sounds (words).

### 1.5.7 Dynamism :

*Dynamism* is a property of language represented in the changes that come about in language over a time. Human language changes gradually as against animal communication that remains *static* in nature, is inflexible, and shows no changes at all. Verbs may be *stative* (disallowing the use of progressive aspect) or *dynamic* (allowing the use of progressive aspect) in syntax in English.

### 1.5.8 Redundancy :

A property in language and linguistics, *redundancy* finds reflection in marked shifts in syntactic units and in tone. For instance, take the manner in which it happens in the transformation of sentences. An assertive 'yes-no' sentence like 'He is coming with us', when transformed to an interrogative sentence, shows certain changes : 'Is he coming with us ?' and the tone would change to a rising tone. This not only happens in transformations, but also while using tag questions or question tags.

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4

1. **ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN NOT MORE THAN FIVE SENTENCES EACH IN YOUR OWN WORDS.**

- a. What is discreteness ? How does it find reflection in language ?
- b. Show how language demonstrates dynamism by citing some examples of your own.
- c. Comment on redundancy as a property of language, giving suitable examples.

2. **WRITE SHORT NOTES ON THE FOLLOWING.**

- a. Creativity and Productivity.
- b. Culture Preservation and Culture Transmission

3. **SAY WHETHER THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE TRUE OR FALSE. GIVE REASON FOR YOUR RESPONSE FOR EACH OF THEM.**

- a. Duality is a quality inherent in language.
- b. Nature refers to inherent character, property or attributes of something.
- c. Recursiveness makes language open-ended.

4. **FILL IN THE BLANKS IN THE FOLLOWING FIVE ITEMS CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE OPTION (A, B, C, OR D) FROM THOSE GIVEN BELOW EACH OF THEM.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is a reference to the inherent character, properties or attributes of something by means of which we can identify and categorize it, especially its structure, composition, and characteristics.  
(A) Nature (B) Nurture (C) Evolution (D) Devolution
2. The absence of any 'natural' or logical connection between a linguistic form and its meaning is an example of \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(A) ceativity (B) arbitrariness (C) Productivity (D) Discreteness

3. \_\_\_\_\_ allows the formation or interpolation of sentences within sentences, thus giving rise to complexity.  
(A) Nature (B) Evolution (C) Recursiveness (D) Acceptability
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is a condition wherein we displace something in place of something else, or of replacing one thing with another.  
(A) Transmission (B) Preservation  
(C) Acculturation (D) Displacement
5. Verbs may be *stative* i.e. disallowing the use of progressive aspect, or \_\_\_\_\_ i.e. allowing the use of progressive aspect in syntax in English.  
(A) dynamic (B) dual (C) discrete (D) redundant

#### Answers to Task 3

- a. **True** : Duality in language and linguistics is taken to mean the dual nature of language systems such that if there are distinctions of form and meaning, and structure and function.
- b. **True** : Nature is a reference to the inherent character, properties or attributes of something by means of which we can identify and categorize it, especially its structure, composition, and characteristics.
- c. **False** : Creativity in language involves the ability to do something new, using *recursiveness*, a state of recurrence, with actions or processes repeating indefinitely.

#### Answers to Task 4

1. (A)      2. (B)      3. (C)      4. (D)      5. (A)

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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This entire Unit is about the evolution and nature of language including definitions of language and meaning. We defined and discussed the theory of language evolution and pointed out the challenges confronting linguists in mapping language evolution. We have argued that it is easier to map the evolution of writing rather than speech due to the absence of reliable data in case of speech. We then moved to take up the definitions of language and examined five such definitions in detail. Then we shifted our discussion to meaning and we drew upon the work of Geoffrey Leech in enumerating and examining types of meanings and meaning relations. The last sub-unit was on nature of language where we discussed eight properties of language.

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## 1.7 KEY WORDS

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**Empiricism** : A type of theory in epistemology, the basic idea in which is that experience has primacy in human knowledge and justified belief.

**Rationalism** : A term used in philosophy to highlight how reason has precedence over other ways of acquiring knowledge, or, more strongly, that it is the unique path to knowledge.

**Scepticism** : A term used to indicating usual common refusal to grant that there is any knowledge or justification.

**Philology** : Another term for Comparative Historical Linguistics. A branch of linguistics, which studies language change and language relationships by comparing earlier and later forms of a language and by comparing different languages.

**Evolution** : Also called Darwinism so named after Charles Darwin. It is the view that biological species evolve primarily by means of chance variation and natural selection.

**Epistemology** : (From Greek *episteme*, ‘knowledge’, and *logos*, ‘explanation’), the study of the nature of knowledge and justification; specifically, the study of (a) the defining features, (b) the substantive conditions or sources, and (c) the limits of knowledge and justification.

**Metonymy** : A figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated. For example, “crown” for a King/Queen or “Shakespeare” for the plays of Shakespeare.

**Phonology** : The science of sounds, which helps establish and describe ‘the distinctive sound units of a language (phonemes) by means of distinctive features’.

**Lexes** : Words of any given language listed in the dictionary. Lexicon is the technical term we use for a dictionary. Dictionary comes from the word ‘diction’, which is a reference both to choice of words especially with regard to correctness, clearness, or effectiveness, especially in speaking and the style of articulation and enunciation in speaking/singing.

**Syntax** : It studies how words combine with one another to form sentences and the conventions that govern sentence–formation.

**Morphology** : A science that studies how a morpheme – the smallest meaningful and indivisible unit in a language – combines in the formation of a word.

**Inflection** : The extension of a word by adding an *affix* to it or addition of –s/–es to it, depending on conventions of language use.

**Semantics** : The study of meanings. It makes a historical and psychological study of words and the classification of changes in the signification of words or forms viewed as factors in linguistic development.

**Pragmatics** : The science of meaning in a social context. It studies how sentences are related one to the other and the contexts and situations in which we use them. In other words, pragmatics studies meaning in a social context.

**Conceptual meaning** : We also call it ‘denotative’ or ‘cognitive’ meaning sometimes. It is one of the essential features of language in terms of communication and works on the twin principles of *contrastiveness* and *structure*.

**Connotative Meaning :** Communicative value is central in *connotative* meaning, showing how it is closer to the notion of ‘reference’, and a set of criteria brings out the contrastive features in connotative meaning. Leech brings out the fact that there is a thin boundary between conceptual and connotative meaning.

**Social meaning :** It is what our language use has to convey about our social context. Language varies from region to region which is how we have dialects and different styles of use. Status also plays a major role in language use.

**Affective meaning :** It has to do with emotions, where one would find a marked change in the intonation pattern, as in ‘Don't tell me that this cannot be done.’; ‘Why don't you take a break !’; or ‘Give me a break!’

**Reflected meaning :** It is meaning that shapes out of our reaction to events like Bhajans, Qawwalis, Ghazals etc with a whole range of emotions that these evoke, and the meaning we derive from attending such events depends on the emotions they evoke in us.

**Collocative meaning :** It takes its name and form from collocation, which is a noticeable arrangement or joining of linguistic elements such as words to attain a particular purpose, such as in the case of the phrase ‘grace-abounding’, or “make the bed”.

**Associative meaning :** It is a particular part of the complete meaning of an expression that associate the expectations of a speaker/writer with what they might be referring to such as an object, a person, or a situation.

**Thematic meaning :** What gets communicated due to the way in which a speaker or writer shapes his/her message, especially in terms of bringing together, providing focus, and emphasis, for example the transformation of a sentence in active voice into its passive construction.

**Synonymy :** The quality or state of being synonymous in having the same connotations, implications, or reference. There may be similarity between two words in a given language but they are not the same. For instance, although perfume and scent are synonymous related as they are to a pleasant smell, the former is gas-based chemical formulation and the latter is a product of oil/s extracted from flowers.

**Antonymy :** It is a mismatched relation between two words. It owes more to gradable and non-gradable words.

**Homonymy :** A relationship two words belonging to the same grammatical category and spelling pronounced the same way even as their meanings and origins are different.

**Hyponymy :** A generic name that not based on a familiar species. It is in action from the sense one gets from the relation between the predicates *man* and *human*.

**Polysemy :** The semantic relationship between any given word and the meanings in the context of its make-up as concept and the history

it has behind it. A ‘foot’, for instance, can be a reference to a part of human body, the lowest part of a mountain, a unit of measurement etc.

We have explained the keywords in Sub–Unit 1.5 exhaustively which is why we would not repeat what we have said there.

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## 1.8 BOOKS REFERRED AND SUGGESTED

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**Note :** Suggested readings have been marked with an asterisk (\*).

1 Adapted from “Evolution.” *Merriam–Webster.com*. Merriam–Webster, n.d. Web. 01 Nov. 2018.

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