



Block**1****THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE**

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August, 2019

© Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2019

ISBN :

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Further information on Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068 or visit University's web site <http://www.ignou.ac.in>

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by Registrar, MPDD, IGNOU.

Laser Typeset by : Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, A.F.E.-II, Okhla, New Delhi

Printed at :

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Language and Linguistics is a six-credit course which has four blocks.

We begin the course (Block 1) with discussing **the Nature of Language** and the perspective of major linguists in understanding language. Since language is spoken/written primarily within society, we attempt to comprehend its variable and dynamic nature. We also look at language in a multilingual framework.

In block 2, **The Sounds of English**, we discuss the vowels and consonants of English. English has a unique stress pattern which is different from Indian languages. In this block we look at word stress as well as stress and rhythm in connected speech.

In block 3 **Word Formation Strategies**, we begin by discussing the basic concepts of English word-formation. We also take up some of these processes, such as Inflectional morphology, Derivational morphology, Conversion and Compounding.

In block 4 **Sentence Type: Form and Function**, we touch upon some aspects of grammar with which you are already familiar. These include Basic patterns of English, the Noun Phrase, The Verb Phrase, Compound and Complex sentences and Sentence transformation.

We hope you enjoy the course!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

While all species on this planet have some form of language or the other, the human species has been bestowed by nature with a complex form of language which also brings into play the immense creativity of the human species.

In this block we make you aware of those features of language which are peculiar to human beings. We also help you understand the way acquisition of language has been understood in the 20th century by giving you the Structuralist, Mentalist and the Sociocultural perspectives.

You are also aware that language is ever changing, subject to variation across gender, age, region, class, caste and so on. In most societies more than one language is spoken and people speaking different languages live with ease and comfort. In fact most people in the world are bilinguals/multilinguals and this greatly enriches their world view. In this Block the four units are as follows:

Unit 1 What is Language? Unique Features of Human Language

Unit 2 The Structuralists, Mentalists and Sociocultural Perspectives

Unit 3 Language and Society-1: Understanding Variability

Unit 4 Language and Society- 2: Multilingualism

Do read the units carefully and apply the contents to aspects of your life!

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 WHAT IS LANGUAGE? UNIQUE FEATURES OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Definitions of Language
- 1.3 The Origin of Language
- 1.4 Functions of Language
- 1.5 Knowing a Language
- 1.6 The Uniqueness of Human Language
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Answers
- 1.9 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- critically analyze the definitions of language given by various linguists and scholars;
- understand the functions of language;
- discuss various theories of the origins of language;
- distinguish language from other forms of communication, especially animal communication.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“There is no mode of action, no form of emotion that we do not share with the animals. It is only by language that we rise above them”, said Oscar Wilde.

What then is this unique facility called language, which sets us apart from other creatures, helps us respond to our environment and above all, enables us to reflect on the very essence of our being? Language is that system by which sounds and meanings are related (Fromkin and Rodman, 1974). Language communication and human needs are unquestionably linked. Human beings have various needs — individual, social, emotional, economic, political and cultural and it is to fulfill these that human beings need language. Even the youngest infant expresses its needs which are primarily biological to begin with. As the infant grows, his/her needs become more complex, so does its language. From the stage of whimpering in discomfort or gurgling with pleasure, the individual reaches the stage where s/he starts reflecting on his/her needs.

Language does not exist in a vacuum. It serves and is moulded by other systems in the human mind. Since language is used to convey ideas, its structure and function must reflect these ideas. Besides, since it exists within a complex social

and cultural system, it is moulded by these aspects as well. Language pervades and is pervaded by all aspects of our lives.

1.2 DEFINITIONS OF LANGUAGE

Language is a term, which due to its range of applications, has prompted innumerable definitions. Some of these focus on the general concept of 'language', others on more specific aspects of 'a language' and yet others on its more formal features like phonology, grammar and semantics. Then there are also those which emphasize on its range of functions or those which stress the differences between language and other forms of human and animal communication. The range of definitions given below amply illustrates this point.

'Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.' (E. Sapir, 1911)

'A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which the members of a society interact in terms of their local culture.' (G. Trager, 1949)

'A language is a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed of a finite set of elements.' (N. Chomsky, 1957)

'Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.' (N. Chomsky, 1983)

'Language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral - auditory arbitrary symbols.' (R.A. Hall, 1964)

'Audible, articulate meaningful sounds as produced by the action of the vocal organs.' (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Vol.2, 1971)

'Language is the most sophisticated and versatile means available to human beings for the communication of meaning.' (Brown, 1984)

'Language is patterned system of arbitrary sound signals, characterized by structure dependence, creativity, displacement, duality, and cultural transmission.' (Aitchison, 1987).

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) You've read the various definitions of language. Now, write your own definition of language.

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- 2) What are the functions of language which emerge from these definitions?
Name at least two functions.

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1.3 THE ORIGINS OF LANGUAGE

‘The suspicion does not appear improbable that the progenitors of man, either the males or females, or both sexes, before they had acquired the power of expressing their mutual love in articulate language, endeavored to charm each other with musical notes and rhythm’. (Darwin, 1871)

In Charles Darwin’s vision of origins of language, early humans had developed musical ability “to charm each other”. This is an interesting speculation about how language may have originated. Nonetheless it remains a speculation.

We simply do not know how language originated. We do know that the ability to produce sound and simple vocal patterning appears to be in an ancient part of the brain that we share with all vertebrates but this is not human language. Due to the absence of direct physical evidence or artifacts relating to speech of our distant ancestors, there has been a lot of speculation about the origins of human speech.

As a result, numerous philosophers have presented their theories on the origin of language.

The divine source

In the early part of the eighteenth century, theories of the origin of language proposed that language was of Divine Origin. According to them man was created and at the moment of his creation, speech was provided to him as a divine gift. In the biblical tradition, as described in the book of Genesis, God created Adam and “whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” Alternatively, following a Hindu tradition, language came from Sarasvati, wife of Brahma, creator of the universe. In most religions, there appears to be a divine source who/which provides humans with language.

Other cultures too propagated the divine origin of language “ the Egyptians, for example, considered themselves the oldest civilization and therefore theirs was the original language, passed down through their god-ancestor. One of their rulers – Psammetichus is said to have tried an experiment to test this theory. He had two babies from an ordinary family raised in isolation. When they were two years old, the babies abruptly said “*bekos*”, which in Phrygian means “bread”. Psammetichus believed that this proved his theory that **Phrygian** was the original language. However, this seems highly unlikely. The children may not have picked up this “word” from any human source, but as several commentators have pointed

out, they must have heard what the goats were saying. (First remove the 'kos' ending, which was added in the Greek version of the story, then pronounce *be* as you would the English word *bed*, Can you hear a goat?).

In an attempt to rediscover this original divine language, more experiments have been carried out, with conflicting results. The basic hypothesis seems to be that, if human infants were allowed to grow up without hearing any language around them, then they would spontaneously begin using the original God-given language.

All experiments with infants who have been living in isolation, without coming into contact with human speech, tend not to confirm the divine source claim. Very young children living without access to human language in their early years grow up with no language at all.

The natural sound source

A different view of the beginnings of language is based on the concept of natural sounds. The basic idea is that primitive words could have been imitations of the natural sounds which early men and women heard around them.

When an object flew by making a caw-caw sound, the early human tried to imitate the sound and used it to refer to the thing associated with the sound. And when another flying creature made a coo-coo sound, that natural sound was adopted to refer to that kind of object. The fact that all modern languages have some words with pronunciations that seem to echo naturally occurring sounds could be used to support this theory. In English, for instance, we have *splash*, *bang*, *boom*, *rattle*, *buzz*, *hiss*, *screech*, and forms such as *bow-wow*. In fact, this view has been proposed by Muller and is called the **Bow-Wow** theory – also referred to as **Onomatopoeic** or **Echoic** theory. The theory suggests that first words were imitative of natural sounds – the cry of birds, the call of animals, etc. Although Muller rejected this theory, it is true that virtually every language has some percentage of onomatopoeic words in its vocabulary. This phenomenon is called onomatopoeia that is imitating natural sounds to form words. An argument against this has been that we hear and imitate the sounds of nature within the limitations of our first language. A popular example of this cultural influence is the roosters crowing – in English it is cock-a-doodle-doo; in French, coquerico; in Russian, kukuiku; in German, kikeriki, etc.

The social interaction source

Another theory involving natural sounds has been called the “yo-he-ho” theory. The idea is that the sounds of a person involved in physical effort could be the source of our language, especially when that physical effort involved several people and the interaction had to be coordinated. So, a group of early humans might have developed a set of hums, grunts, groans, and curses that were used when they were lifting and carrying large bits of trees, etc.

The appeal of this theory is that it places the development of human language in a social context. Early people must have lived in groups as living in larger groups offered better protection from attacks. Groups were social organizations and to maintain them some form of communication is required, even if it is just grunts and curses. So, human sounds, however they were produced, must have had

some principled use within the life and social interaction of early human groups. This is an important idea that may relate to the uses of humanly produced sounds. It does not, however, answer our question regarding the origins of the sounds produced.

The physical adaptation source

Anthropologists believe that the factors that led to the development of the species *Homo sapiens*, also led to the development of language – the upright posture gave humans additional visual range, their eyes became stereoscopic, further improving their vision. Human teeth, lips, mouth, larynx and pharynx as compared to other primates facilitate production of speech. The cerebral cortex, virtually non-existent in the lower creatures, developed tremendously in the evolving human. It was with this major development that the human being graduated to reasoning powers and began to speak.

The tool-making source

In the physical adaptation theory, one function that is producing speech sounds must have been superimposed on existing anatomical features (teeth, lips) previously used for other purposes (chewing, sucking). A similar development is believed to have taken place with human hands and some believe that manual gestures may have been a precursor of language. By about two million years ago, there is evidence that humans had developed preferential right-handedness and had become more capable of making stone tools. Wood tools and composite tools eventually followed, tool-making, or the outcome of manipulating objects and changing them using hands is evidence of brain work.

The human brain is not only large relative to human body size, it is also lateralized, that is, it has specialized functions in each of the two hemispheres. Those functions which control the motor movements involved in complex vocalization (speaking) and object manipulation (making or using tools) are very close to each other in the left hemisphere of the brain. It may be that there was an evolutionary connection between language-using and tool-using abilities of humans and both were involved in the development of speaking brain.

The genetic source

The human baby in its first few years shows a number of physical changes. In a relatively short period of time, the larynx descends, the brain develops, the child assumes an upright posture and starts walking and talking. This almost automatic set of developments and the complexity of the young child's language have led some scholars to look for something more powerful than small physical adaptations of the species over time as the course of language. It has been proposed that human offspring are born with a special capacity for language. It is innate, no other creature seems to have it, and it isn't tied to any specific language. Is it possible that this language capacity is genetically hard-wired in the newborn human?

As a solution to this puzzle of origin of human language, this innateness hypothesis would seem to point out to something in human genetics, possibly a crucial mutation, as the source. We are not sure when this proposed genetic change might have taken place or how it might relate to the physical adaptations described earlier. However, as we consider this hypothesis, we find our speculations about

the origins of language moving away from fossil evidence or the physical source of basic human sounds toward analogies with how computers work (pre-programmed or hard-wired) and concepts taken from genetics. The investigation of the origins of language then turns into a search for the special “language gene” that only humans possess.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What is the name given to the theory which holds that the origin of human speech comes from the sounds heard by humans in their environment?

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- 2) Which of the above theories seem to be most appealing to you and why?

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- 3) Can you think of some onomatopoeic sounds in your mother tongue? List them

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1.4 FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

How language began continues to be somewhat of a puzzle but why language evolved seems clearer. Perhaps as Jean Aitchison says, it began because human beings needed to cooperate in order to survive, and for efficient cooperation a satisfactory mode of communication was required.

Language is a complex phenomenon with multiple functions. Various linguists have tried to understand and elucidate the functions of language. Roman Jakobson defined six primary functions of language according to which an effective act of verbal communication can be described. These functions are:

The referential function:

This function is primarily used to convey information which was one of the primary reasons that language was discovered. Descriptions of situations, objects and even mental states come under this.

The expressive function:

This function reports feelings or attitudes of the speaker or writer and it is also meant to evoke feelings in the listener or reader. This form of communication can also happen when we are alone. For example, if my mobile phone falls into a bucket of water, what do you think I'm likely to say to myself? Probably use a swear word. We can also utter emotive utterances of a positive nature, especially when we sight something of great beauty "Wow, isn't that beautiful!"

The directive function:

This function engages the addressee directly and is usually used for the purpose of **causing** or **preventing** an action. It is therefore found in commands and requests and requires the use of vocatives and imperatives, example, "Adit, come here at once", "Please shut the window."

The phatic function:

This involves language for the sake of social interaction. This function can be observed in greetings "Hi, how are you" and casual discussions about the weather, i.e. "It's so hot these days".

The poetic function:

This function focuses on the message for its own sake, and is used in poetry as well as in slogans. This is an aesthetic function of language.

The metalingual function:

This function is used to talk about language itself as we are doing in this unit.

However, it is very rare for any piece of discourse to serve only one function, unless it is a very specialized and restrictive piece of discourse; most ordinary kinds of discourse are mixed.

Check Your Progress 3

Given below are sentences expressing one of the functions. Indicate the appropriate function against each.

- i) "It looks like it may rain, doesn't it?"
- ii) Tired eyes,
Aching feet,
The commuters scramble
For a seat.
- iii) Don't come near me.
- iv) India has a long tradition of grassroots bilingualism.
- v) Your dress looks beautiful!
- vi) The place looked neat and clean.
- vii) English syntax is quite different from Hindi.

1.5 KNOWING A LANGUAGE

Language is the unique ability that makes us human. We can communicate our thoughts, feelings and ideas with the help of language. But have we ever paid attention to this unique ability that we possess? We use language so spontaneously that we hardly think about it. If we have to imagine a life without language, how would it be? It seems impossible to live without language in our lives. What is this unique ability then? What constitutes 'knowing' a language?

Normally when we say we know a language, it implies that we can speak to and be understood by people who know that language. This means that we are able to produce certain sounds, which are naturally interpretable as having a certain meaning.

Since all of us know at least one language and are able to use it without making much of a conscious effort, why do we need to discuss it? Exactly this is the objective of the unit to make us aware that the ability to carry on the simplest conversation requires a profound knowledge of the language of which speakers are unaware. A speaker can produce the most complicated sentences without being aware of the principles and rules that govern their formation.

So what is this specific knowledge possessed by speakers of a language? In other words, what does knowledge of a language mean?

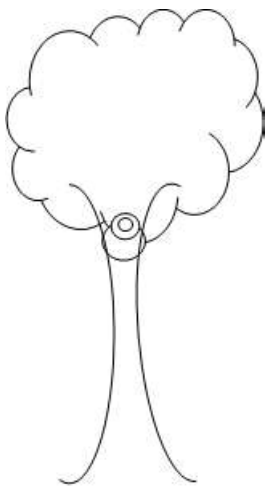
1.5.1 Knowledge of the Sound System

When we say we know a language, we imply that we know the sounds of that language and we can distinguish the sounds which are not part of that language. This fact becomes quite clear when speakers of a particular language pronounce words from another language. For example, a speaker of Bengali, Assamese or Oriya is not able to articulate the distinction between the sounds 'b' and 'v'. When they say the word '**Vivek**' it comes out as '**bibek**'. The very fact that they mispronounce it reveals they are unconscious of this fact. They are able to distinguish it when they encounter it in the written form or when another person is speaking those words, but are unable to articulate the distinction properly themselves.

It is not enough that speakers of a language know only the permissible sounds of their language, they also possess an unconscious knowledge of the permissible sound combinations and also the position in which these sounds can occur in a word. When a speaker of one language encounters a word which has a different sound combination than that which is permissible in his/her language, s/he will in all probability mispronounce that word unless s/he consciously makes an effort to learn the 'new' sound (of another language system).

1.5.2 Knowledge of the Meaning of Words

When we know a language we are able to relate sound to meaning, i.e., apart from a knowledge of the sounds and sound patterns, it is important to know that certain sound sequences signify certain meanings. When we hear a word from a language which is new to us we are unable to comprehend it but speakers of that language are able to understand each other. Each concept/meaning is named differently by each language. To understand this let us take the following example:



Sound	Signifier
/tri:/	(English)
/m a R a m/	(Tamil)
/g a: c ^h /	(Bangla)
/p e: D/	(Hindi)
/a: r b o l/	(Spanish)

The universal concept/meaning of a tree (a woody perennial plant, typically having a single stem or trunk growing to a considerable height and bearing lateral branches at some distance from the ground) is common to every human who has been exposed to the concept/meaning of a tree. However, how we name this concept differs from one language to another. As we can see in the above example, the concept is named 'tri' in English, 'maRam' in Tamil, 'ga:c^h' in Bangla, 'pe:D' in Hindi and 'a:rbol' in Spanish. Therefore, the relation between the sound (signifier) and the meaning (signified) is arbitrary.

Why is it called tree in English and 'arbol' in Spanish has no logical connection. It is a convention among the speakers who speak the same language.

When we say that the relationship between the sound (t r i) and meaning (signified) is arbitrary we do not imply that the choice of what the concept will be called is left entirely to the speaker since the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community. Ferdinand de Saussure (also known as the father of modern linguistics) points out that the relationship between the signifier (sound) and signified (meaning) is unmotivated, i.e., arbitrary, in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified.

Many languages share many sounds but the way in which they combine them to form words and the meaning that they assign to even a similar combination is not the same. This at times can have amusing consequences. For example, Bulgarian and Hindi share a sound sequence 'kutia', which in the former means a 'box', while in the latter it refers to a 'female dog'. This shows very clearly how sound and the meaning attached to it is arbitrary.

However, there are some words in most languages whose pronunciation suggests the meaning – these are referred to as **onomatopoeic** or **echoic** words. Sounds of these words imitate sounds of nature. But even here there may be a variation from language to language. The most well known example is the cock's crow that we referred to earlier on in this unit.

But even if a person knows all the correct sound combinations and their meanings in a language, one could not say that s/he "knows" the language. Knowledge of a language also means that you know how to combine words to form phrases and

further to be able to combine phrases to form sentences. Since it is not possible for a person to memorize all the possible sentences of a language, it is obvious that using language also means being creative – there are many sentences a person speaks which s/he has never spoken or heard before. This is essentially what is meant by **creativity** of language, i.e. **the ability to “create” and understand novel sentences which one has never uttered before.**

The number of sentences one can produce is infinite. It is this feature of human language which makes it truly unique. The ability that we have to be able to produce infinite number of novel utterances each time we speak must be due to some special knowledge of the language system that we possess.

1.5.3 Knowledge of Appropriate Social Context

Just being able to create novel sentences is not enough, one must know exactly where they can be used i.e., one must have a knowledge of the appropriate contexts for their use. This is the social aspect of language. To communicate effectively, we should know what kind of response is expected in a particular situation. If you respond by saying “the weather is very fine”, when someone asks you your name, it would not be appropriate, although your answer would not be grammatically incorrect. Words and tones have the property of bringing to mind associations with things and ideas, and communication is possible to the degree that the speaker and hearer have similar associations. Words and tones are therefore symbols with meanings. Since context determines and modifies the meanings of what is said, we must attribute meaning potentials to the contexts also.

A language then, consists of the sounds, words and possible sentences. When we say that we know a language, we mean that we know the sounds and the words and the rules for their combination and use in appropriate social contexts.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Can knowledge of a language exist without knowledge of the social context? Discuss with examples.

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- 2a) Make a list of the sounds in your mother tongue.

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2b) Now identify which of these sounds are absent in another language, say English.

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2c) Do you have a problem in pronouncing words with the sounds of 2 (b) above. If you do, then why do you think it happens?

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2d) What do we mean by 'signifier' and 'signified'? How are they related?

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1.6 THE UNIQUENESS OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

It is language which more than anything else distinguishes human beings from animals. We frequently refer to language as being unique to humans. What then is unique about human language and how is it different from the forms of communication produced by other forms of life?

It is generally accepted and understood that language deals with communication. Now the nature and scope of this communication is influenced by various factors – physiological, environmental, social and need-based. Increasing complexity of information content calls for a correspondingly complex message-generating system. Therefore, species in which behaviour is mediated by complex social interrelationships evolve, by virtue of this fact, a communication system which can fulfill the needs generated by this level of interaction.

If we view language only as a communication system, then many other species also communicate. Communication involves active intentional transmission of a signal as well feedback from the receiver, creating a closed loop between the participants.

Language, spoken and written, is a human being's chief instrument of communication, but it is not the only one. Gestures have a similar role, as also other forms of symbolism. Giving flowers to someone has a meaning, particular clothing or ornament is a device to make known one's affiliation and loyalties. Thus, communication is a pervasive manifestation with many forms. Our concern here is primarily with spoken language, but to understand it we need to see how it is related to other communicative behaviour.

1.6.1 Animal Communication

It is evident that different animal species show different forms of vocal and gestural behaviour. One of the most remarkable species is the bee, which is capable of communicating with great accuracy the location of nectar by carrying out a series of motions which have been described as a 'dance'. The bee moves in alternate directions around a constant axis, so as to describe an approximate figure 8. The axis of movement indicates the direction of the find, the speed of the circling is related to the distance, and the agitation of the animal reflects the abundance of the find. While the dance is being executed near the hive, the other worker bees form a circle around the dancer. After witnessing the movements for a few moments, the other bees make off in the proper direction and fly the correct distance before descending on to the flowers.

Another form of bee communication occurs when part of a colony is ready to swarm. The bees assemble at a convenient point outside the hive, apparently long enough to establish a centre of operations. Then workers go off in different directions. Those bees that come upon a suitable location return to the main group and indicate by their excitement that they have found a site. Bees that fail to find a suitable location also return. If favourable reports come in from a number of directions, the swarm shows indecisiveness, moving to one side and another until a weight of opinions has formed in favour of one of the locations. In their communicative behaviour bees do not employ vocal sounds, but the buzzing made by the vibrating wings apparently plays a role in conveying excitement and emphasis, perhaps comparable to degrees of conviction in human beings.

Another interesting form of vocal behaviour is imitative. There are several classes of birds that engage in sound imitation as far as communication of the species is concerned. Perhaps it is merely an exceptional manifestation of the echoic tendency, common in lesser degrees to many animal species. Imitation usually occurs within a species.

Most animals have a very limited number of messages that they can convey and receive. For example, the male of a certain species of grasshopper has a choice of six which could be translated as follows:

I am happy, life is good

I would like to make love

You are trespassing on my territory

She's mine

Let's make love

Oh how nice to have made love

Not only is the number of messages limited for the grasshopper, the circumstances under which each message can be communicated is also highly restrictive. Dolphins, in spite of their intelligence and large number of clicks, whistles and squawks, seem to be restricted in communicating about the same things again and again and even the clever velvet monkey, who is claimed to make thirty-six different vocal sounds, is obliged to repeat these over and over.

In contrast to the phonetic ability of other species, human beings are definitely superior. Many animal species pronounce only vowels and even here perhaps

only one or a few particular ones; some manage one consonant, especially fricatives of outgoing breath. The ability to produce stops or plosives is far less frequent, and the combination of stoppage and vibration of the vocal cords may be entirely lacking. The human being's superiority consists in being able to manage a great number of resonant, fricatives and stop consonants; to make click and inbreathed sounds as well as outbreathed ones; and above all to produce complex combinations and sequences of varied sounds. Their abilities go far beyond the demands of any single language, as is evident from the richness of exclamatory and imitative sounds in all languages with phonetics that go beyond the language in question, as well as, the ability to learn foreign words.

1.6.2 Instinctive-Intuitive vs. Formal Communication

Communication is normally an intentional and planned activity. However, at times we say things we do not mean to say, or our tone of voice tells things we had planned not to reveal. If we trace communication back to the lower animals we find that there can be such a thing as instinctive communication. If one member of a species experiences pain, fear or any other emotion because of a physical stimulus and utters a cry, makes a grimace, or moves away, and if this reaction evokes an analogous or related emotions in other individuals, an act of communication has taken place, whether or not any conscious intention has been involved. If the reaction pattern follows a strict inborn tendency, it is instinctive. If the tendency is generalized and is subject to conditioning by experience, it may be better described as intuitive. In so far as a code language has been developed, requiring considerable learning and involving many arbitrary associations between the sound and its meanings, we are dealing with a formal system. Human spoken languages constitute such codes.

Thus, two main levels of communication can be distinguished: the instinctive-intuitive found in all animals, and the formal, conventional or arbitrary found only in the human species. The formal systems of communication include gestures, language and pictorial symbols. Art forms are complex behaviour system involving features of intuitive and formal communication. The formal system of communication may have evolved out of the intuitive, and very primitive art forms may have played a role in the process.

1.6.3 Features of Human Communication

There have been a number of attempts to determine the defining properties of human language, and different lists of features can be found by different writers. We have taken six core features and described how they are manifested in human language. We have also shown how these features are uniquely a part of human language and unlikely to be found in the communication systems of other creatures.

Arbitrariness:

In animal communication, there is frequently a connection between the signals and the messages sent. For instance, an animal who wishes to warn an opponent may simulate an attacking attitude. A cat, for example, will arch its back, spit and appear ready to pounce.

In human language, the reverse is true, and there is no 'natural' link between a linguistic form and its meaning. That is, the relationship between the signifier (sound) and signified (meaning) is arbitrary. This feature has been discussed in

earlier section of this module with the example of 'tree'. To consider another example, we can see that there is no connection between the word DOG and the four legged animal it symbolizes: it can equally be called kutta (Hindi), chien (French), hund (German).

This idea of a 'signifier' and its arbitrary relationship with 'signified' was given by Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist who was working around the turn of the twentieth century. He is credited with pointing out several important aspects of language. Among many things he proposed the idea that words are more than just a list of items. He called them signs – linguistic signs. He defined a linguistic sign as consisting of two things, a concept (signified) and sound-image (signifier). He identified various properties of a linguistic sign one of which he stated was arbitrariness.

The need for learning:

It appears that the role played by 'learning' in animal communication is very little. Their language is more or less genetically inbuilt. For example, bee-dancing, which is used by the bees to convey information about the course of nectar, is quite the same in bee colonies all over the world. And since, we do not expect the bees all over the world to be holding international conferences, we have to agree with the hypothesis that they are born with the language.

Another interesting thing to notice is that if a human child is brought up in isolation, s/he does not acquire language, whereas birds reared in isolation sing songs that are recognizable. Human beings require a long exposure to language in order to acquire it. This does not mean that human language is totally conditioned by the environment. According to Chomsky, human beings are born with an innate 'language acquisition device' (LAD), but environment plays an important role in triggering this innate ability. We should note that every normal child learns an extremely complex grammatical system before s/he is 3 years old. Language is certainly one of the greatest wonders of human societies; it could not be accomplished unless we were endowed with an innate language faculty.

So we can say that although both humans and other animals seem to be genetically predisposed to acquire language, it seems in humans, this latent potentiality can only be activated by long exposure to language, which requires careful learning.

Displacement:

Most animals can communicate about things in the immediate environment only. An animal utters its cry of danger only when danger is present. It cannot give information about a peril which is removed in time and place. Human languages, on the other hand, can communicate about things that are absent as easily as about things that are present. This property of human language is called displacement.

For example, we can talk about our childhood experiences and also predict future possibilities. We can talk about things which may not be present in our immediate surroundings. The ability to talk about concepts in abstraction is unique to human beings.

It is interesting to note that bee communication seems to exhibit this property of displacement to some degree. For instance, when a worker bee finds a source of nectar, and returns to the hive, it can perform a complex dance routine to communicate to the other bees the location of this nectar. This ability of the bee

to indicate a location at some distance must indicate that bee communication has some degree of displacement as a feature. The crucial factor, however, is that of degree. Bee communication has displacement in an extremely limited form not just in terms of distance but also in terms of directionality. If the source of nectar is perpendicular to the hive, the worker bee gets confused and fails to communicate effectively. Human language on the other hand is much more comprehensive where this property is concerned. We can talk of events remote in space or time from the speaker or hearer.

Duality of Structure:

Animals have a stock of basic sounds (a cow has under ten, while gorillas and chimpanzees have between twenty and thirty) which they can use only once. That is, the number of messages an animal can send is restricted to the number of basic sounds, or, in the more complex systems such as the dolphins, a few simple combination of sounds. And there is no known internal organization within this system.

In contrast, human language works very differently. Every language has a set of thirty to forty basic sounds which are called phonemes. These phonemes are generally meaningless in isolation. Imagine a person uttering the basic sounds 'a..k..u..t..v..r..l..j..h... Do you think it would be possible for this person to convey any meaning? These basic sounds or phonemes become meaningful only when they combine with each other in accordance with the rules of a language. So we can say that human language is organized into two levels or layers, i.e., a layer of individual sounds which combine with each other to form the second layer of bigger units like words. This kind of organization into two layers is called duality of structure or double articulation.

At one time, it was thought that duality was a characteristic unique to human language. But now some people claim duality is not unique to humans as it is present in bird song where each individual note is meaningless. It is the combination of notes which conveys meaningful messages. However, the complex ways in which words are combined to create an infinite number of sentences may indeed be unique to humans.

Patterning:

Close to the phenomena of duality is patterning. As you are aware most animal systems of communication comprise a simple list of sounds. There does not seem to be any internal organization within the system.

Human language, on the other hand, has well defined internal patterns. There are firm restrictions on which elements (sounds, words, etc.) can occur together, and in which order. For example, take the sounds 'o', 'p', 't', and 's' in English. These sounds can be arranged in the following seven ways only: 'spot', 'stop', 'opts', 'pot', 'pots', 'top' and 'tops'. Other possibilities like 'tsop', 'ptos', 'opst', are not possible because the rules of English do not allow these.

Similar kinds of patterns are followed when words are combined to form sentences.

A similar kind of internal organization occurs at the sentence level. Human beings can automatically recognize the patterned nature of language and manipulate structured chunks of language. For example:

That beautiful woman gave me flowers.

That woman gave me flowers.

She gave me flowers.

Human beings can understand that these sentences are structurally equivalent. Animals, as far as we know, do not use structure-dependent operations.

Creativity:

The most important distinction between human and animal communication is that human beings are essentially creative in their use of language. On the other hand, animals have a limited number of messages that they can send or receive. For example, bees can communicate only about nectar. Dolphins, in spite of their intelligence, use a large number of clicks, whistles and squawks, to communicate merely about the same thing over and over again.

This type of restriction is not found in human language which is essentially a creative process i.e., human beings can produce absolutely new utterances whenever they feel like it. A person can utter a sentence which has never been said before, in the most unlikely circumstances, and still be understood. Even in everyday routine communication, a person does not say the same thing over and over again.

The word creativity is not to be understood as 'creative writing' which involves literary use of language or poetic language. Here creativity refers to the ability to utter infinite number of novel utterances each time a person wishes to speak. Every human being uses this property of human language in day to day communication.

Other features:

Human language does have many other properties, but they may not be unique to it. Some of the other features may be:

Vocal-auditory channel:

Human linguistic communication is typically generated via the vocal organs and perceived by the ears. However, linguistic communication can be transmitted without sound, via writing. Moreover, many other species, example dolphins also use the vocal-auditory channel.

Broadcast transmission and directional reception:

A signal can be heard by any auditory system within earshot, and the source can be located using the ear's direction-finding ability.

Rapid fading:

Auditory signals are transitory, and do not await the hearer's convenience (unlike animal communication or writing).

Interchangeability:

Any speaker/sender of a linguistic signal can also be a listener/receiver.

Total feedback:

Speakers hear and can reflect upon everything that they say (unlike the visual displays often used in animal courtship, which are not visible to the displayer).

Specialization:

What is Language: Unique Features of Human Language

The sound waves of speech have no function other than to signal meaning (unlike the audible panting of dogs, which has a biological purpose).

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Explore the communication system in at least one other animal system and compare it to human language. Do you see any links?

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- 2) Suggest at least three properties which are very rare or absent in animal communication

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- 3) What is meant by the terms creativity and arbitrariness as is used to describe a property of human language?

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- 4a) The property which relates to the fact that a language must be acquired or learned by each new generation is

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- 4b) The term used to describe the ability of human language users to discuss topics which are remote in space and time is

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen that one of the most distinctive characteristics which set us apart from other life forms is the highly evolved mode of communication which we call language.

Philosophers and scientists have long debated the origin of human language and even today there is no consensus as to when exactly human beings started to speak. There are a number of theories which attempt to explain the origin of language.

Several principles operate at the level of learning of language. These involve knowledge of the sound system, and that of the meaning of words and appropriate social context of use.

We have also attempted to identify some properties of human language which makes it different from animal communication.

1.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Do it yourself.
- 2) Interaction with other members of society; expression of emotions.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Bow-Wow theory
- 2) Discuss which theory seems to be most powerful. Give reasons to support your claim.

(Hint: choose a theory which is more inclusive/holistic in its approach)

- 3) Do it yourself.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Phatic function
- ii) Poetic function
- iii) Directive function
- iv) Metalingual function / Referential function
- v) Expressive function
- vi) Referential function
- vii) Metalingual function

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) No, social context is very important for effective communication. For example, you will behave formally with your boss in the office, but much more informally at a picnic.
- 2d) 'Signifier' is the sound of a word which is different in each language and 'signified' is the meaning or concept. The relationship between the two is arbitrary. It is the collective understanding or convention which is followed by a linguistic community. Individuals do not have the right to change these signifiers.

Check Your Progress 5

- 2) Arbitrariness, displacement and duality of structure.
- 3) Read 1.6.3 for the answer.
- 4a) The property which relates to the fact that a language must be acquired or learned by each new generation is **need for learning**.
- 4b) The term used to describe the ability of human language users to discuss topics which are remote in space and time is **displacement**.

1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Akmajian, Adrian. et al. 2003. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited.

Aitchison, J. 1987. *Linguistics (3rd Edition)*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Yule, G. 2010. *Study of Language (4th Edition)*. Cambridge: CUP.

UNIT 2 THE STRUCTURALISTS, MENTALISTS AND SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Structuralists
 - 2.2.1 The Linguistic Sign
 - 2.2.2 Saussurean Principles: Concepts of Structural Linguistics
 - 2.2.3 American Structuralists
- 2.3 The Mentalists
- 2.4 Sociocultural Linguistics
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Suggested Readings
- 2.8 Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Trace the development of structuralist, mentalist and sociocultural perspectives in Europe and America,
- Understand the concept of sign and differentiate between signifier and signified, paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, langue and parole, diachronic and synchronic relationships
- Understand the work of the mentalists and their differences with the sociocultural theorists.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The term ‘structuralism’ was given to a school of thought which developed in 1960s in France when Claude Levi-Strauss published the work *Anthropologie structurale* (1958) and attempted to discover the **objective** meaning of human culture. Thus, structuralism attempts to establish autonomous and objective fields of study in human sciences. In the 20th century scholars believed that to complete our knowledge of the world we must arrive at the **structure** of the system, i.e. the **relationship between the members of the system**. Hence the search for structure became an important guiding principle of 20th century scholarship and created an era of structuralism in scientific research. The linguists who worked within this paradigm are called ‘structuralists’ or structural linguists.

In contrast to structuralists the mentalists refused to look at language through mechanistic methods. They argued that the ‘linguistic consciousness’ of speakers must be considered important in the study of language and thought. The mentalists

or cognitivists, as they were called, thus made claims about the relationship between language and the mind. The work of cognitive linguists like Noam Chomsky followed from the work of the mentalists and resulted in a whole new area of study in linguistics called **Transformational Generative Grammar**.

There were some scholars who believed that any study of language and the mind cannot dissociate language from culture and society. Sociocultural theorists argued that the scope of sociocultural linguistics is vast and includes interdisciplinary work drawing from different disciplines like sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, discourse analysis, and sociology of language. Many scholars like Sapir-Whorf and Dell Hymes (1964) highlighted the importance of studying language through an interdisciplinary approach by understanding the social and cultural functions of language use.

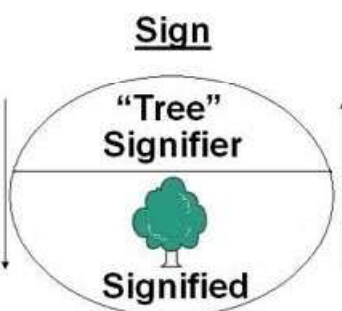
In this Unit we trace the work of the structuralists, mentalist and those who worked within the sociocultural paradigm.

2.2 STRUCTURALISTS

The foundational principles of structural functional linguistics were based on the lecture notes of the great Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) published after his death as *Cours de Linguistique Generale* (CLG). Saussure's principles defined much of the structuralist model of linguistics and provided a landmark in the history of linguistics. In Europe, Saussure influenced the Geneva School of Albert Sechehaye and Charles Bally who worked on much of Saussure's notes after his death, the Prague School of Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy, whose work would prove hugely influential, particularly in phonology, the Copenhagen School of Louis Hjelmslev, and the Paris School of Algirdas Julien Greimas. Structural linguistics also had an influence on other disciplines in Europe, including anthropology, psychoanalysis and Marxism, bringing about the movement known as **structuralism**.

2.2.1 The Linguistic Sign

Saussure gave the concept of the linguistic sign. According to him the word-labels and meaning-concepts produce a system of signs. There is no doubt that many of our words and concepts are closely tied. When we use the word tree, we also have in mind the corresponding image of a tree. Let's consider the image as the concept TREE. The concept of a tree includes a complex feature matrix which would include a bark, branches, leaves, etc. Whenever we see a new tree we don't need a new word for it. We use the word tree. Notice that this naming relationship is **arbitrary**. This means there is no reason why a tree should be called a tree and not a bush. But the speaker of English would never call a tree a bush or vice versa. This pairing of the label or name (in this case tree) and the concept (a bark, branches, leaves, etc.) gives us what is known as the **linguistic sign**. Thus, the concept/thought of a tree, the sounds used to utter that word and the actual object 'tree' must constitute one single entity — a linguistic sign. Each sign consists of two parts: a **signifier** i.e. a label or name and a **signified** i.e. the concept. The sign is the association which binds the label and the concept together.



2.2.2 Saussurean Principles: Concepts of Structural Linguistics

Saussure made a distinction between **langue** and **parole** which differentiates between the linguistic system and its actual function or use. Thus, **langue** is the system or structure of a language whereas **parole** is the activity of speaking or writing in a language or actual speech. These two concepts can be understood as follows:

Langue- when language is viewed as an abstract system used by a speech community, in contrast to the actual linguistic behaviour of individuals.

Parole- is using language both in speech or writing in context.

Saussure also discussed **synchronic** and **diachronic** linguistics. The study of language can happen at a particular point in time or can be taken up as an evolution over time. Synchronic linguistics studies language as a system in a **particular state, at a point of time** while diachronic linguistics is the study of language **across time** (evolution of language over time).

According to Saussure, the system of language works in two distinct ways—combination and substitution. These two relations are called **syntagmatic** and **paradigmatic** and represents the relationship between signs which is associative. In the syntagmatic relationship units such as sounds, phrases, clauses, sentences and discourse are chained together in a fixed sequence and combination. For example at the level of sound take the simple word like cat. This word consists of three units — the sounds /k/, /æ/ and /t/. They combine together to form the word cat. This relationship is syntagmatic.

Paradigmatic relationship, on the other hand, refers to the relationship which holds between units that are there and units that are not there but potentially could have been. Let us take an example again. The first unit of the word cat is /k/. There are many other sounds which could have come in this place, like, /p/ or /b/ or /m/ giving words like *pat*, *bat*, *mat*. The relationship which holds between the unit /k/ and other probable options like /p/, /b/ or /m/ are paradigmatic.

2.2.3 American Structuralists

Structuralism in the United States grew independently to that in Europe. The works of Bloomfield (1887-1948) and Sapir (1884-1939) mainly influenced structuralism in the United States. While the European linguists were interested in how the whole was related to its parts and the coherence of the parts in the whole system, American structuralists were mainly interested in studying the “distribution of elements as it is observed and the capacity of these elements for association and substitution” (Benveniste 1971:8).

European scholars were interested in ancient languages and the development of modern European languages from them whereas American structural linguists were primarily interested in describing and classifying the American Indian languages. American linguistics since the beginning of this century, have been oriented towards the current of structural linguistics by the work of scholars such as Boas (1858-1942), Sapir (1884-1939) and Bloomfield (1887-1948).

Inspired by the work of Boaz, **Sapir** started analyzing the languages of American tribes. Language, according to Sapir, was a communicative and social activity.

His interest in language was far ranging. In addition to grammatical analysis, he took into account the humanistic and cultural aspects of language. He also published papers on the functioning of language in creative literature, mythology and religion. Although he was a structuralist in his orientation, he held a moderate position. For him language was a product of history, “the product of long continued social usage” (Sapir, 1921:2). In the structural conception of language formulated by Sapir, the most striking fact was the aspect of **universality**. He conceived of language as a structure which is universal. Sapir refused to look at language through mechanistic methods. His approach was more mentalistic as opposed to mechanistic or behavioristic approach of Bloomfield. His student Benjamin Whorf further developed this idea which will be discussed later in the Unit.

Another important structural linguist was **Bloomfield**. His work was closely related to behaviourism in psychology. According to **behaviourism**, human conduct is totally predictable i.e. it can be explained on the basis of situations in which it occurs, independently of all internal factors. Even speech must be explained by the external conditions surrounding its production. Accepting the basic idea of behaviourism, Bloomfield, in his book Language (1993), formulated his mechanistic and materialistic conception of language which is based on **stimulus-response**. Bloomfield’s main concern was to develop linguistics into a scientific discipline and this he did by using scientific descriptive statements. Due to placing very heavy emphasis on **objective observation** he had become an Empiricist and had adopted a view of linguistic science that allowed only statements based on generalizations drawn from observable facts by a set of mechanical procedures. Influenced by Bloomfield’s idea of language, American linguistics remained committed for a long time to the principle that language must be analyzed **without regard to meaning**. Efforts were made to evolve a methodology based on an exhaustive description of the behavior of linguistic units without reference to meaning. Within Bloomfieldian structuralism the researcher’s task would simply be **classification** or **taxonomy** — a grammar is simply a classification of segments (phonemes, morphemes, words, word groups) that appear in the utterances of the corpus.

Structuralism, of which American structuralism is the extreme formalizing tendency, thus introduced the epistemological break which was a flat **description** of language.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Trace the development of structuralism in linguistics.

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- 2) Discuss the difference between the following:

- i) Diachronic and synchronic linguistics
- ii) Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships

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2.3 THE MENTALISTS

In the early 1950s, many scholars began to question structuralism, and by the end of the decade new ideas emerged in a big way. During this time a new theoretical perspective known as **mentalism** became popular. The term refers to those branches of study that concentrate on perception and thought processes: for example, mental imagery, consciousness and cognition, which are studied in cognitive psychology. The term **mentalism** has also been used by **behaviorists** who believe that scientific psychology should focus on the structure of causal relationships to conditioned responses, or on the functions of behavior. The mentalists unlike the structuralists believed that objects of knowledge have their existence in the mind of the perceiver and thus it is important to study the properties of the human mind, rather than just their directly observable manifestations. Though mentalism was an offshoot of behaviourism it gave way to cognitive linguistics. In linguistics, mentalism is associated both with **generative linguistics** and the more modern approaches that go under the heading of **cognitive linguistics**. Mentalist linguists describe the mental patterns of language or the internalized grammars that underlie linguistic behaviour.

The mentalist notions of Chomskyan linguistics has had a profound influence on applied linguistics. Chomsky, a student of Zellig Harris was concerned with discovering a **general theory of grammatical structure**. He believed that an adequate grammar should provide a basis for explaining how sentences are used and understood. He reproached the Bloomfieldians for “their satisfaction with description and their refusal to explain” (1981:38). According to him, as other developing sciences, linguistics should also endeavour to establish a more ambitious goal than mere description and classification. Linguists should aim at developing methods not just for description of language but also for **understanding the nature of language**. This was possible only if one takes recourse to **intuition** of native speakers.

Generative grammar is the theory of language proposed by Chomsky in his book *Syntactic Structures* (1957). It provides a set of finite rules that defines the unlimited number of sentences of the language and associates each with an appropriate grammatical description. There are two principal goals which underlie this theory:

- a) The **universal features** (i.e. features which are inherent to language as a whole) which constitute grammars of individual languages should be characterized in formal terms. This is called **Universal Grammar (UG)**.
- b) In order to arrive at formal statements to characterize the grammars of individual languages it is important to describe the tacit knowledge or

competence which native speakers have about syntactic, phonological, morphological and semantic patterning in their language. Linguistic **performance** is the way language system is used in communication. Generative grammar sees the theory of competence as forming a central component of language which interacts with principles from cognition, neurology, physiology and other domains to give language its overall character.

Chomsky's notion of competence and performance are in many ways modern reinterpretations of Saussure's classic distinction between 'langue' and 'parole'. However, there are some major differences between the mentalists and the structuralists—the most significant being Chomsky's reinterpretation of the goals of linguistic theory. While the structuralists' goal of linguistics was to construct inventories of the linguistic elements in particular languages, along with statements of their distributions, Chomsky believed that the goal of linguistics must be redefined to define specification of a universal grammar (UG). This UG is innate to human mind.

Chomsky took up certain concepts given by his teacher, Harris, and gave them a new interpretation, for example the notion of **transformation**. This introduction of the concept of transformation has led to referring to the entire formal approach as **Transformational Generative Grammar**. He also interpreted many features of the American structuralism in a new fashion, as for example his notion of **deep structure** could be traced back to Sapir's inner-form. Despite the resemblances to his predecessors, there was an element of novelty in Chomskian theory.

Katz, in his book 'Mentalism in Linguistics', treats the problem of taxonomic conceptions in linguistics as done by the Structuralists, and asserts that taxonomic conceptions of linguistics should be rejected. He wrote "we have found that the taxonomic linguist confined linguistic investigation to stating those facts about the structure of a natural language which can be formulated within the framework of a classificational system, while the mentalist goes far beyond this in seeking a full answer to all three questions. This difference is important: it justifies us in rejecting the taxonomic conception in favor of the mentalistic one." (Katz, 1964: 84)

Within the paradigm of cognitive linguistics, the work of Steven Pinker is noteworthy. Pinker who is a Canadian-American cognitive linguist, works on visual cognition and psycholinguistics. He has published in the area of children's language development, regular and irregular phenomena in language, the neural bases of words and grammar, and the psychology of cooperation and communication, including euphemism, innuendo, emotional expression, and common knowledge. In his books he proposed a general theory of language acquisition and discussed how children learn verbs. In his work with Alan Prince (1989) he questioned the connectionist model of how children learn the past tense of English verbs, arguing in favour of default rules such as adding "-ed" to make regular forms and learning irregular forms one by one.

In his books, he has argued for the instinctive nature of the human language faculty, which is shaped by natural selection and adapted to our communication needs. Five of his books are on aspects of psycholinguistics and cognitive science. These are: The Language Instinct (1994), How the Mind Works (1997), Words and Rules (2000), The Blank Slate (2002), and The Stuff of Thought (2007).

In the next section we will consider the work of sociocultural linguists who argued that the study of language must not only consider aspects of competence but also performance, which cannot be understood in isolation from the context in which language is used. Thus, the complex interplay of language with culture and society must be acknowledged to gain a holistic understanding of how language operates on practice.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What is the difference between the mentalists and the structuralists? In what way have the mentalists made advancements on structuralists?

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- 2) What is the difference between competence and performance?

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2.4 SOCIOCULTURAL LINGUISTICS

Sociocultural linguistics includes a range of theories and methods for the study of language in its sociocultural context. Many scholars felt that the term sociolinguistics is limited in scope as it is associated with only certain types of research which quantitatively analyzes various linguistic features and correlates them with sociolinguistic variables. The term sociocultural linguistics on the other hand, highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to language, culture and society.

In the United States, sociocultural linguists, have taken a broad approach to the study of language and the social and cultural functions of language use. As discussed above, generative and cognitive linguistics have been dominant in the United States since the mid-twentieth century. However, American linguists tried to bring their studies closer to other fields of social inquiry. In 1929, Edward Sapir, though popular as a structuralist, urged linguists to move beyond diachronic and formal analyses for their own sake and to “become aware of what their science may mean for the interpretation of human conduct in general” (1929:207).

Sapir’s student Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) studied the relationship between language and our perception of reality and its representation in the human mind.

His work became famous as **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** and has two aspects: **linguistic relativity** and **linguistic determinism**. The principle of linguistic relativity says that different people see the world in different ways; some people see only one kind of water, others may see five different kinds of water and therefore feel the need for having five different words for different kinds of water. While a certain community may be happy with the words 'uncle' and 'aunt', another may have ten different words in this domain of kinship terms. There is thus no natural or absolute way of labelling the world around us. According to the theory of **linguistic determinism**, language provides the framework for our thoughts and it is impossible to think outside this frame.

Another influential sociocultural linguist was Dell Hymes (1927-2009) who established models for ethnographic study of language use. He extensively researched on the languages of the Pacific Northwest. Though Dell Hymes worked within the sociolinguistic tradition, he was one of the pioneers in establishing a relationship between **speech** and **social relations**. Hymes argued that Chomsky's distinction between **competence** and **performance** had sidelined the importance of the latter. He thus proposed the notion of **communicative competence**, or knowledge necessary to use language in social context, as an object of linguistic inquiry. The definition of language use varies across different communities and hence Hymes' early work focused on ethnographic inquiry into contrasting patterns of language use within different speech communities. He initially worked on "speech events" which were documented instances of language use studied by a process which he termed "the ethnography of speaking" and later renamed as "ethnography of communication" to reflect a larger focus on ways of communication within a community of speakers which included nonverbal as well as verbal behaviour. Hymes extensively analyzed folklore and oral narratives with the aim of arriving at "the competence... that underlies and informs such narratives" (Hymes 2003:vii). He created the Dell Hymes model of speaking which has been extensively used in language education.

Stephen C. Levinson (born in 1947) is known for his work in the areas of culture, language and cognition. His earliest work was with John Gumperz in interactional sociolinguistics, where he studied the interaction patterns in a multilingual community in India. He has written on pragmatics, and produced the first comprehensive textbook in the field in 1983. He has been influenced by the Gricean principles, which is a broad theory of communication that focuses on the role of conversational implicatures. He worked with Penelope Brown on language structures which are related to formality and politeness across the world. This work was published as a book called 'Politeness: Universals in Language Usage' (1978/1987) which is a foundational work in Politeness theory. His current work focusses on aspects of linguistic diversity and its importance to cognitive science. This has led to the development of new models of language documentation. Levinson and Gumperz re-evaluated the notion of linguistic relativity discussed by Sapir-Whorf in the early nineties. Levinson in his later works highlighted the relationship of language and space which he argued was a form of linguistic relativity where speakers of certain languages who used different spatial systems solved non-verbal spatial tasks in distinct ways.

Thus, the sociocultural linguists emphasized the importance of culture and society in the study of language. They critiqued the mentalists and developed the concept of communicative competence which has been widely used in language education.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What are the main aspects of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?

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- 2) What is the contribution of Dell Hymes to sociocultural linguistics?

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have traced the development of structuralism in Europe and America. We have also discussed important concepts such as paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, langue and parole and diachronic and synchronic studies. We discussed the work of some of the structuralists.

In the next section we gave you the reasons why some scholars questioned the structuralists and arrived at a generative framework. The work of the mentalists was discussed along with some concepts like competence and performance and universal grammar.

Finally, we looked at the work of sociocultural linguists and how they laid emphasis on linking the study of language with culture and society. They questioned the focus of the mentalists on innate competence of the native speaker and highlighted that aspects of performance cannot be ignored when language is studied in the context of how it is used.

2.6 KEY WORDS

- Structuralism** : An approach to the study of language which considers a language to be primarily a system of relations-i.e., the place of every element in language (speech sound, word, etc.) is defined by the way it relates to other elements in the language.
- Generative grammar** : A particular grammar of a particular language which, in a purely mechanical way, is capable of enumerating all and only the grammatical sentences of that language.

Paradigmatic relation :	Any relation between two or more linguistic items or forms which are competing possibilities, in that exactly one of them may be selected to fill some particular position in a structure.
Syntagmatic relation :	A relation between two or more linguistic elements which are simultaneously present in a single structure, example /k/, /æ/ and /t/.
Langue	: In Saussure's classification, language is regarded as a system shared by a community of speakers.
Parole	: The particular utterances produced by particular speakers on particular occasions.
Diachronic	: Pertaining to language change over time. Example, from old English to Middle English to Modern English.
Synchronic	: Pertaining to a language at a particular point of time. Example studying English now would be a synchronic study of Modern English.
Signifier	: The form of a linguistic sign.
Signified	: The meaning of a linguistic sign.
Mentalism	: The belief that such unobservable phenomena such as mind, thoughts, intentions, and mental processes generally are objectively real, and hence can reasonably be involved in scientific investigation and be made the object of study.
Behaviourism	: An approach in psychology which holds that psychologists should study only observable and measurable phenomena and should not appeal to unobservable things like 'mind' and 'intention'.
Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis	: The hypothesis that the structure of our language significantly affects the way we perceive the world.
Intuition	: A judgement which you make about your own language (whether something is grammatical or not), what it means whether it is ambiguous or not, how it is related to something else, and so on.
Competence	: An idealization of a speaker's knowledge of his/her language, excluding such factors as slips of tongue, memory limitations or distractions.
Performance	: The actual linguistic behaviour of particular individuals on particular occasions, including any hesitations, memory lapses, slips of tongue or processing difficulties arising from long or complex structures.
Phonology	: Pertaining to the sound system
Morphology	: Pertaining to word-formation
Semantics	: Pertaining to meaning

- Universal Grammar (UG)** : The hypothetical structural properties which are necessarily common to all human languages, both real and possible, presumably because these properties are part of the human language faculty.
- Transformational grammar** : A theory of grammar developed by Noam Chomsky in 1950s and extensively modified by Chomsky and others in succeeding decades.

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2.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The development of structuralism in linguistics:
 - Influenced by the work of great Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)
 - Saussure's principles defined much of the structuralist model of linguistics and provided a landmark in the history of linguistics
 - In Europe, Saussure influenced various other schools of thought
 - Saussure's concept of linguistic sign consists of two parts: a **signifier** i.e. a label or name and a **signified** i.e. the concept
 - distinction between *langue* and *parole* which differentiates between the linguistic system and its actual function or use
 - Saussure also discussed synchronic and diachronic linguistics
 - According to Saussure, the system of language works in two distinct ways—combination and substitution. These two relations are called syntagmatic and paradigmatic and represents the relationship between signs which is associative
 - The works of Bloomfield (1887-1948) and Sapir (1884-1939) mainly influenced structuralism in the United States

- European scholars were interested in ancient languages and the development of modern European languages from them whereas American structural linguists were primarily interested in describing and classifying the American Indian languages
- American structuralism was influenced by scholars such as Boas (1858-1942), Sapir (1884-1939) and Bloomfield (1887-1948). In Sapir's work, the most striking feature was the aspect of universality. He conceived of language as a structure which is universal. Sapir refused to look at language through mechanistic methods
- Another important structural linguist was Bloomfield. His work was closely related to behaviourism in psychology
- American structuralism introduced a flat description of language

2) i) Saussure's concept of synchronic and diachronic linguistics:

- The study of language can happen at a particular point in time or can be taken up as an evolution over time.
- Synchronic linguistics studies language as a system in a particular state, at a point of time while diachronic linguistics is the study of language across time (evolution of language over time).

ii) According to Saussure, the system of language works in two distinct ways—combination and substitution.

- In the syntagmatic relationship units such as sounds, phrases, clauses, sentences and discourse are chained together in a fixed sequence and combination.
- Paradigmatic relationship, refers to the relationship which holds between units that are there and units that are not there but potentially could have been.

iii) Saussure's concepts of Langue and Parole:

- **Langue**- when language is viewed as an abstract system used by a speech community, in contrast to the actual linguistic behaviour of individuals.
- **Parole**- is actually using language both in speech or writing in context

Check Your Progress 2

1) Mentalism became popular as a theoretical perspective which questioned structuralism.

- There are some major differences between the mentalists and the structuralists—the most significant being Chomsky's reinterpretation of the goals of linguistic theory. While the structuralists' goal of linguistics was to construct inventories of the linguistic elements in particular languages, along with statements of their distributions, Chomsky, who was a mentalist, believed that the goal of linguistics must be redefined to define specification of a universal grammar (UG). This UG is innate to human mind. Mentalist linguists describe the mental patterns of language or the internalized grammars that underlie linguistic behaviour.

- Structuralism had an extreme formalizing tendency and thus introduced a flat description and classification of language.
 - Mentalism involved understanding the nature of language. The universal features (i.e. features which are inherent to language as a whole) which constitute grammars of individual languages became the focus of mentalists. This was done by taking recourse to intuition of native speakers.
- 2) Competence is the native speakers' innate knowledge about syntactic, phonological, morphological and semantic patterning in their language. Linguistic performance is the way language system is used in communication. These are concepts of generative grammar which sees the theory of competence as forming a central component of language

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis has two aspects:
- linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism.
 - The principle of linguistic relativity says that different people see the world in different ways; some people see only one kind of water, others may see five different kinds of water and therefore feel the need for having five different words for different kinds of water. There is thus no natural or absolute way of labelling the world around us.
 - The theory of linguistic determinism propounds that language provides the framework for our thoughts and it is impossible to think outside this frame.
- 2) Dell Hymes worked within the sociolinguistic tradition and was one of the pioneers in establishing a relationship between speech and social relations.
- Hymes argued that Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance had sidelined the importance of the latter.
 - He proposed the notion of communicative competence, or knowledge necessary to use language in social context, as an object of linguistic inquiry.

UNIT 3 LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY -1:

UNDERSTANDING VARIABILITY

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Types of Variation
- 3.3 Geographical/Regional Variation
- 3.4 Social Class Variation
- 3.5 Caste Variation
- 3.6 Ethnic Variation
- 3.7 Personal Variation
- 3.8 Register
- 3.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.10 Key Words
- 3.11 Suggested Readings
- 3.12 Answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to:

- understand that language is dynamic in nature
- identify the nature of variation
- categorize various factors that lead to language variation
- identify and explore different types of registers

3.1 INTRODUCTION

If you meet someone new at a party and start talking informally, you may tell that person that you are fond of baking. Your comment may generate further interest in that person to enquire whether you enjoy baking cakes, pastries, bread, cookies, pizza or vegetable dishes. Such a follow-up question is expected because the term ‘baking’ conveys a general phenomena but does not quite convey which items you enjoy baking the most. There is after all a variety of things one can bake and baking interests may vary from person to person. Similarly, when we talk about language, we may think of it as a phenomena that includes different languages of the world. Therefore, we may say that we speak English, French, German, Hindi or any other language and that each of these languages is distinct from each another. What is interesting is that most of us talk as if there is one unified language whether it is English, French or any other. But in reality, there are so many varieties and manifestations of each language that you may at times wonder, for example, if a particular variety is really the ‘English’ you are familiar with. Let’s look at a few utterances:

- 1) I might could do it.
- 2) Go to the boot and get some bush chooks and we'll crack a tinnie.
- 3) She don't understand nothing.

What's your immediate reaction? Is any one of the three varieties familiar to you? Do you find any variety strange? Does any one of the above make no sense to you? It may surprise you to know that all the three utterances given above are perfect varieties of English in some part of our planet. The first basically means, 'I might be able to do it' and is a normal utterance in many parts of Scotland. The second means, 'Go to the trunk/boot of the car, get a can of beer out and open it (to drink)' and is typical of Australian English with use of slang words. The third means, 'I don't know anything about this', and is an example of English spoken by the African-American people.

These examples demonstrate variation in grammar and vocabulary across varieties of English spoken in three different countries. It may be for the first time that you have come across words such as, 'bush chooks' or 'tinnie' and found it difficult to guess their meanings. Also, the use of both 'might' and 'could' together in the first example may have baffled you and made you feel that it's incorrect grammatical usage. In addition, we know that each variety of language is characterized by certain type of accent. If you were to hear for example, a Jamaican pop singer for the first time, you may not understand the lyrics at all; even though it is 'English' that the song is in.

Language is essentially dynamic in nature and is characterized by many varieties and manifestations. It can vary from person to person, from region to region and also according to your age, sex, education or occupation. It also keeps evolving. Variability is in-built in language and several factors contribute to it. Whatever be the reason for variation, no two speak exactly alike.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The following depict variability:

When 'fish' is called: 'maach', 'machari'

When 'potato' is called: 'aaloo', 'batata'

What do you think are the reasons for such variability?

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3.2 TYPES OF VARIATION

As we have seen in the examples given above, variability is an integral part of language but it is a complex phenomena that can be difficult to describe. Languages that differ to a large extent from each other are generally mutually unintelligible and the ones that have commonalities are generally mutually

intelligible. When languages are mutually intelligible, it could be because they have a common lineage or have borrowed and lent words from each other extensively because of close proximity. Given this logic, one would imagine that Mandarin and Cantonese are mutually intelligible because they are both spoken in China, share the same base alphabet and have a common writing system. But they are not. The speakers of Mandarin and Cantonese cannot in fact converse with each other even though both are considered varieties of Chinese. The root cause of mutual unintelligibility between Mandarin and Cantonese is the number of tones that each variety uses. While Mandarin utilizes four tones, Cantonese about six to nine. Depending on which tone is used, it changes meaning of words. For instance, the word 'hao' mostly means 'good', 'easy' or 'a good person' but when pronounced using the fourth tone, the meaning changes to 'to like'.

On the other hand, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish, are mutually intelligible languages even though they are spoken in three different countries. Closer home, Hindi and Urdu are also similar and mutually comprehensible even though they are said to be different languages. The reason for mutual intelligibility in these languages is the common ancestry. What we must understand is that whatever be the nature of language variation between languages or its varieties, it is fairly systematic.

Language variation is often categorized into the following types:

- Geographical/Regional variation: When people are separated geographically leading to systematic linguistic diversity.
- Social class variation: When people belonging to different socio-economic class speak differently.
- Personal variation: When language varies because of an individual's age and gender.
- Caste variation: When people belonging to different castes speak differently. Such type of variation is prevalent in India.
- Ethnic variation: When immigrant communities bring in features of their own ethnic background into the dominant language. Such type of variation is witnessed in America and many other countries.

Variation can manifest in use of different sounds, vocabulary or grammar whatever be the language. It is interesting to also note that many 'lingua francas' get created as a common language for communication when people who speak different native languages come together for social or commercial purposes. English has emerged as one of the most wide-spread lingua francas and is often called 'the lingua franca of the whole world'.

Check Your Progress 2

Here is an authentic conversation between a salesman (SM) and a customer (C):

C : Can you show me some shaarts?

SM : Are you Bengali or Punjabi?

C : Why does that matter?

SM : Sir, if you are Bengali, I will show you 'shirts' and if you are Punjabi, I will show you 'shorts'.

The above conversation shows that the salesman is referring to a type of variation that gets manifested in the pronunciation of customers. Which one of the variations is he referring to? Have you come across this type of variation in pronunciation that is peculiar? Give 4 examples.

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3.3 GEOGRAPHICAL/REGIONAL VARIATION

When we talk about English, we are quick to identify a few countries where it is their mother tongue. These include America, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. English spoken in these countries displays diversity and these differences can be noticed in the way words are pronounced, use of vocabulary and grammar. If you watch news commentaries or other programs on TV channels like CNN, BBC, and Australian Network, you will notice such differences. Geographically, all these countries are separated by national boundaries and use English that is distinct to each one of them. The differences get manifested in the following ways.

Let's look at some examples:

Differences in pronunciation (AE: American English; BE: British English; AusE: Australian English)

	AE	BE	AusE
tomato	<i>tomayto</i>	<i>tomahto</i>	
zebra	<i>zehbruh</i>	<i>zeebra</i>	
vitamin	<i>vaytamin</i>	<i>vitamin</i>	
data	<i>dayta</i>		<i>dayta</i>
play		<i>plei</i>	<i>plai</i>

Differences in vocabulary

AE	BE
couch	sofa
gas	petrol
faucet	tap
cookie	biscuit

Difference in spelling

AE	BE
color	colour
theater	theatre
defense	defence
organize	organise

Regional variation and geographical variation are terms often used interchangeably. But we can also look at regional variation within a country. The closer the regional boundaries less likely the variation, but more variations likely as the distance increases between two regions. Spoken English shows a great deal of variation in pronunciation across regions of United Kingdom. For example, the 'utt' in 'butter' is pronounced as 'ut' sound as in 'put' in Yorkshire or the 't' sound may be completely omitted from 'butter' elsewhere. Similarly, in India the word 'boy' may be pronounced as 'ladka' in one region and 'larika' in another. Or there may be a completely different word like 'chhora' in another region. Very often these variations are called 'dialects' of a 'standard' language. The systematic phonetic variations across regions help us to associate certain accents with a particular region. Therefore, certain regional varieties come to be known as Yorkshire English or Surrey English or Banarsi Hindi or Lucknowi Hindi and we are quick to spot a speaker from areas that we are familiar with. Sometimes, we also associate prestige with certain accents but not all.

Differences in vocabulary

	Khari boli (Hindi spoken in Delhi)	Bhojpuri (spoken in eastern U.P)	Bangla (spoken in West Bengal)
tree	per	gaach	gaach
light	roushni	anjor	batti
gram	chana	bhut	badaam
meat	maas	segoti	maangsu

Check Your Progress 3

Collect data from any two languages of the following words:

boy
girl
mother
father
grandfather
grandmother
maternal aunt
maternal uncle
paternal aunt
paternal uncle

Which type of variation do you notice? Do the languages reflect changes in pronunciation/sounds or vocabulary?

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3.4 SOCIAL CLASS VARIATION

All of us live in societies that are stratified into various classes based on the socio-economic status. While such classes are often not clearly defined, we do find that not everyone has the same privileges. The linguistic situation also assumes complexity. We talk with respect and address our parents, neighbors, colleagues with 'aap' or 'tum' markers but inadvertently switch to 'tu' when we talk to a rickshaw wallah or a sabzi wallah. In other words, assuming this hierarchy, we vary our speech.

A number of research studies have shown that different social classes can be identified according to certain phonological and grammatical features that they use. These linguistic differences between social classes have been seen to be fairly systematic. Many researchers have referred to these systematic differences as 'social class dialects'. Also, the higher the social class, the higher the prestige associated with the linguistic features. William Labov, an American linguist tried to scientifically examine the relationship between language and social class to measure their correlation. In his survey of speech of different social classes in the city of New York, and his famous 1966 Ph.d publication, 'The social stratification of English in New York city', he began with a hypothesis that high class New Yorkers use /r/ greater number of times in their pronunciation. He collected and analyzed his data to prove that pronunciation of /r/ is prestigious because it is associated with high class and that middle class and lower class are aware of the prestige associated with the pronunciation of /r/. He identified three stores, Saks (an elite store where people who belong to high socio-economic class shop), Macy's (a middle level store where people who belong to middle socio economic class shop) and S. Klien (a low prestige store where people with low socio-economic class shop). He assumed that the sales persons working in the three stores would imitate the speech of customers coming to these stores. He predicted that the social stratification of different customers at the three stores would be mirrored in a similar stratification of its sales persons. In other words, Labov hypothesized that sales persons, aware of the prestigious /r/ would use it more in Saks than the sales persons working at Macy's or S.Klien. He approached these sales persons posing as a customer and asking questions (for instance, 'Could you tell me where I could find ladies sandals?') that would make them answer by saying 'fourth floor'. By eliciting such a response, he could measure the occurrence of /r/ as casual speech in both the words. Labov would then lean forward and say, 'Excuse me?' As a response, sales persons would reply once again, but this time being conscious of their pronunciation and carefully and emphatically saying, 'fourth floor'.

As expected, the occurrence of /r/ in 'fourth floor' was as follows the first time in casual speech of sales persons:

Saks: 60%

Macy's: 50%

S. Klein: 20%

The result suggested that the pronunciation of /r/ did indeed correlate with social class status and prestige associated with it. However, a more interesting finding was that the occurrence of /r/ increased substantially the second time when the salespersons became careful of their pronunciation. Sales persons at Macy's and

S.klein used /r/ more emphatically, being aware of the prestige associated with it, suggesting that they were trying to improve their social status. Also, some speakers went to the extent of inserting an /r/ where it didn't exist when reading word lists. Therefore, they pronounced 'Cuba' as 'Cubar' and 'idea' as 'idear', hyper correcting themselves. The findings suggested that the greatest variations in pronunciations occur in social classes that have a low status. This is because they want to identify themselves with social classes higher in status, being aware of the prestige associated with those classes and their pronunciation.

Check Your Progress 4

Would you agree that all of us are aware of social class distinctions and modify our speech accordingly when talking to people belonging to different classes? Give at least one example from your own speech or of others you have observed to show how we vary our language when talking to others belonging to a different social class.

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3.5 CASTE VARIATION

Caste in India, termed as 'jaati' or 'varna' is one of the most prominent social variables that is responsible for variation of language. Caste system is a form of stratification or hierarchy where an individual born into a certain caste decides his/her status by birth. People of high status were associated with purity and low caste with untouchability and pollution. Social classes differ in terms of wealth, power and social status and the caste system allows little possibility of in or out movement from hereditary membership.

John J Gumperz published a paper, 'Dialect differences and social stratification in a North Indian village' way back in 1950. His research in Rajasthan mentions how a village 'Khalapur' in Saharanpur is divided into 31 castes, with Brahmins ranking the highest in caste hierarchy, followed by Rajputs, Vaishyas and then the lowest castes of Chamars and Bhangis. Some of the differences that he witnessed in pronunciation between high caste and low castes were the following:

	High caste	Low caste
blanket	bichona	bachona
women's pajamas	silwaar	salwar
to teach	sikhanaa	sakhanaa
brinjal	baigan	bengan
how	kaisa	kasa
meaning	matlab	matbal
a spice	jauaain	ajuaain

Similarly, language variation is seen in both phonology and vocabulary of Tamil Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Tamil traditionally spoken by Brahmins used classical Tamil along with Sanskrit derivatives.

	Brahmin	Non-Brahmin
water	jalam	tannir
sugar	jinni	cini
sheep	tungu	orangu
house	aathu	veedu
husband	aathukar	vittukkaran

Check Your Progress 5

Look carefully at all the examples given above in the caste variation section. Analyze the variations in terms of changes you notice.

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3.6 ETHNIC VARIATION

These variations are seen in countries where there is immigrant population who is expected to learn the dominant/majority language. Ethnic dialects are typically learnt by exposure and are in no way connected to any inherent attributes of a particular ethnic community. The processes that create such dialects and variation have generally not been well-understood. But, typically the speech of these communities contain certain features that become a mark of their identity and contribute to linguistic homogeneity within that group.

Some examples of African American Vernacular English

- Dropping the final /r/.

	African Americans
door	doe
poor	poe

- Final double consonants reduced to one consonant

walked	walk
sold	sole
desk	des

- Use of verb 'be' as a finite verb. Such usage depicts something that is done habitually or an event that has been going on:

He be throwing the ball

She be sick

- Absence of -s marking in third person singular
She like cheese
He like dancing
- Use of double negatives:
He ain't going nowhere.
She don't understand nothing.

3.7 PERSONAL VARIATION

Besides the social factors that lead to variation, personal factors such as gender and age also result in language variation. In languages like Japanese, the difference in speech between men and women is to an extent that women use different words, pronunciation and grammar forms.

Gender Differences

Let us look at few examples:

	Women	Men
I	watashi	boku
mother	okasan	ohukuro
stomach	onaka	hará

While English doesn't have this type of language variation based on gender, it is a known fact that men and women do speak differently. The general perception is that women like to talk about clothes and children and therefore their vocabulary is quite different from that of men who prefer talking about sports and cars. Some of the differences seem to be as follows but are controversial:

- Women frequently use words of admiration: sweet, cute, adorable, lovely, divine, gorgeous
- Women seem to use more tag questions to seek confirmation than men: You will come, wont you?
- Women are more likely to use prestige forms or 'correct' forms compared to men. Men are often heard using swear words while most women tend not to use such words.
- Women's speech is generally cooperative while that of men is competitive. Women tend to appreciate, admire and sympathize with others while men like to outdo each other when they talk.

Age

This is a well-known variation that can be observed easily. Older people in India have the habit of saying, 'God bless you' or 'My blessings are with you' while you will not hear this from a teenager. Teenagers usually have their own informal slang words that they use. A few examples are as follows:

bro- a casual nickname for 'brother'

It's lit: for 'It's cool/real/legitimate'

TBH: Acronym for 'to be honest'

Bae: Short for 'baby' used for a significant other such as girlfriend or boyfriend.

Acronym for 'Before anyone else'

Age pattern is a typical pattern that is based on linguistic variation and describes the change in the speech of individuals as they get older.

Check Your Progress 6

Observe speech of older people in your family and your friends whom you interact with. Give examples of the words/sentences that the old and the young use frequently.

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3.8 REGISTER

So far, we have looked at language variation according to the social-personal characteristics of the speaker (such as the region to which one belongs, social class, caste, sex, age, and so on). Now we will look at speech variation according to the different social situations/contexts in which a speaker finds himself/herself.

Many factors can come into play in controlling the kind of language a speaker uses on different occasions. For example, if one talks to one's colleagues about their work, the language is likely to be rather different than one will use at home with one's family. In other words, the language will depend on the relationship between the participants engaged in the act of communication. With one's family one is likely to be informal, with one's colleague would be more formal, and with the boss the most formal.

Example:

To wife: Hurry up we'll be late.

To colleague: It's time we left, we'll be late for the meeting.

To Boss: Sir, its 3'o clock, and the meeting's at 3.15, shouldn't we leave?

This type of variation is more formally encoded in some languages than in others. In Japanese, there are different terms used for the person one is speaking to, depending on the amount of respect or deference one wishes to show. French has two pronouns (*tu* and *vous*), with the former reserved for close friends and family. Although English does not have such pronoun distinctions, there are definite options available for indicating one's relationship with the person one is addressing (Yule, 1985)

Differences in formality also occur in the written language as well. Example,
Just a short note to tell you that we reached home in one piece.

This is to inform you that we've reached home safely.

The formality-informality scale overlaps with another variable, namely the **subject matter** of the conversation. Topics such as quantum physics and international economics are likely to produce linguistic varieties which are more formal than those used in discussions on cooking and politics. Moreover, the language of the

various disciplines itself is different. The language of law is quite different from the language of medicine, which in turn is quite different from the language of engineering. The variation is mostly at the level of vocabulary, although in a few cases, there is specialized syntax as well.

Example:

All one can say is that the child's lexicon is drawn from more than one language, while the grammar is still in the early developmental stages.

The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,...

In batch system models, the biological components and a supporting nutritive medium are added to a closed system.

The filamentous bacteria comprise only a few genera.

Language also varies accordingly to whether it is written or spoken. Other things being equal, written English is more formal than spoken English, and this pertains to other languages as well. To give an extreme example, in Tamil and in Bengali, there is a clear and rather considerable difference between a literary variety (grandika) of the language and a colloquial variety (vayavahirka). Therefore, variation could be due to the **mode** of communication.

From the above discussions we have distinguished speech according to three general types of dimension: relationship between participants, subject matter of conversation and mode of communication, i.e. speech or writing. Michael Halliday (1978) calls these three general types of dimensions: **field**, **mode** and **tenor**. **Field** is concerned with the **purpose** and subject matter of communication, **mode** refers to the means by which communication takes place, notably speech or writing; and **tenor** depends on the relations between participants.

Another widely used model has been proposed by Dell Hymes (1972), in which no less than thirteen separate variables determine the linguistic items selected by a speaker, apart from the variable of 'dialect'. It is very doubtful if even this number reflects all the complexities of register differences. Nevertheless, each of these models provides a framework within which any relevant study of speech similarity and differences may be located.

Check Your Progress 7

Given three examples of language variation according to the relationship between the participants.

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3.9 LET US SUM UP

This unit has discussed the important relationship between language and society and highlighted how language is dynamic in nature. Variability in language can be seen all around us. Hopefully, the next time you notice some type of language variation, you will be able to reflect on its nature and identify certain linguistic features of that variety.

In addition, you have also learnt what 'registers' are. You have reflected on the various registers associated with certain disciplines/fields that you are fairly familiar with and the ones you are not familiar with and noted how language use is so diverse and vast.

All the language variations that have been discussed should help you to understand how they are an integral part of speakers' identities and their social interactions with others.

3.10 KEY WORDS

variability: is a core term used in sociolinguistics to show that language we use every day is remarkably varied. There is variation across speakers, regions and within the speech of a single speaker. Also, there can be more than one way of saying the same thing. Language of different people may show variation in pronunciation (accent), word choice (lexicon) or grammar.

register: refers to specific lexical (words) or grammatical choices depending on the social context, the participants and the mode (written or spoken).

field: describes the purpose of communication.

mode: refers to the medium in which communication happens (oral or written).

tenor: exhibits the relationship between participants (formal or informal).

3.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Wardaugh, R. and Fuller, J.M. 2015. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Seventh Edition. Wiley Blackwell. (pp. 25-41; 45 & 52)

3.12 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

The first example depicts variability at the level of sounds/pronunciation and the second at the level of words. Regional boundaries create such variations.

Check Your Progress 2

Regional variation

Collection of data: open-ended

Check Your Progress 3

open-ended

Check Your Progress 4

Yes, we do. We talk differently to people belonging to lower strata of our society, often referring to them as 'tu'

Check Your Progress 5

Language variation is either in sounds/pronunciation or words that are completely different from each other.

Check Your Progress 6

Open-ended

Check Your Progress 7

Open-ended



UNIT 4 LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY- 2:

MULTILINGUALISM

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Myth of Monolingualism
- 4.3 Language Families in India
- 4.4 The Pervasiveness of Multilingualism in India
- 4.5 Multilingualism as a Resource
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Key Words
- 4.8 Suggested Readings
- 4.9 Answers

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit will help you to:

- understand the nature of multilingualism in India
- critically examine the myth of monolingualism
- reflect on how multilingual discourse shapes interactions and identities
- appreciate its pervasiveness and implications on language use and language education
- understand the need to use multilingualism as a resource

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The context of India is unique. This is because it is a multilingual country that is characterized by four predominant language families with languages that far exceed the number that any other country can boast of. It is fascinating that people in our country speak several languages as part of their daily living. For instance, a person who has moved to Delhi from a state in Bihar can typically talk in Bhojpuri or Maithali to someone in/from his/her native village, in Hindi/Punjabi with friends and strangers at public places, and in English at work. While this may suggest that people use particular languages that are specific to certain social domains, it's not always completely true. People who have access to multiple languages also mix or switch between languages in informal social contexts. For example, they may say:

kal jo maine movie dekhi, it was so exciting!

(The movie that I watched yesterday was so exciting!)

he is such a *bhaisahab ki mera us se baat karne ko man hi nahi karta*.

(He is such a 'non-smart' person that I don't feel like talking to him.)

uh tohka taakat raha hai.
(He is staring at you.)

The usage of the word ‘bhaisahab’ in the second example which is reserved for addressing an elder brother/person respectfully does not in fact always carry respect or politeness. It is sometimes used in a derogatory manner to show that such a person is not smart because of the way he dresses up or speaks. Little nuances such as these can only be captured and understood by people in social interactions when they have similar proficiency levels and multilingual orientations. The nature of such interactions suggest that these multiple languages are perhaps not organized in our brain in a compartmentalized manner but are fluid. This simply means that a person with such a multilingual disposition can mix or switch between languages quite naturally without consciously thinking about how to use them.

A ‘verbal repertoire’ that each person has in multilingual societies comprises a range of languages and variations within them. Mohanty, a well-known sociolinguist writes of his linguistic repertoire:

I use Oriya in my home, English in my work place, Hindi for television viewing, Bengali to communicate with my domestic helper, a variety of Hindi-Punjabi-Urdu in market places in Delhi, Sanskrit for my prayer and religious activities, and some conversational Kui with the Konds for my research in their community. These languages fit in a mutually complementary and non-competing relationship in my life. (Mohanty 2006, 263)

Multilingualism is prevalent across the world and not just in India. People who speak different languages many a times live near each other. Or sometimes there may be political boundaries between nations, or there may be widespread immigration within a country but in all such cases, groups of people come into contact and communicate. Examples would be of German and French regions within Switzerland or Germany where children from diverse linguistic backgrounds in schools may be adept at Turkish, German and English, or Russian, German and English. Languages in such situations may be acquired through informal exposure or formal instruction at school. However, it is usually the case that multilinguals have varying degrees of command of the languages in their repertoire and some of the languages may not have positive associations with them.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Which state or region do you belong to? Which languages are spoken there or in the neighboring state?

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- 2) Name the languages you know. At what age did you acquire them? Which of them are you most comfortable in while talking? And why?

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4.2 MYTH OF MONOLINGUALISM

Traditionally, many countries that were considered monolingual are actually not any longer monolingual or have inherent diversity that wasn't taken into consideration. One such example is that of countries where English is the native language. If we take the case of America, we find that it has so many immigrant communities today that have migrated from Mexico, Cuba, India, China, and Africa that it no longer qualifies as a monolingual country. Immigration has largely contributed to its linguistic diversity. Besides English, Spanish is the second largest language spoken in the country.

If we take the case of the UK, the common perception is that English is the native language. This sort of assumes that one single 'English' binds the whole country. However, there are as many as 30 dialects within the country that are so varied and distinct, especially in their accents, that it may be impossible to comprehend some of them. In addition, the country also has 11 indigenous languages. Again, we associate only 'French' with France but as many as 28 different accents or dialects are spoken in different parts of France. Some of these include Corsican, Breton, Basque, Catalan. If we consider China, 'Chinese language' comes to our mind thinking that it is one language. This is actually far from accurate. There are approximately 298 languages spoken in China, and the term 'Chinese language' refers to a group of 7 linguistic varieties with one single ancient origin. Most of us have heard of Mandarin and Cantonese but the others that are not so well known are Wu, Min, Gan, Xiang and Keia. Some of these varieties are mutually unintelligible even though they have the same origin.

The above examples illustrate that monolingualism is a myth. Some countries, as we have seen in the examples given above, while seemingly have one language, different varieties and different accents contribute to its diversity. Besides existence of several languages, varieties/dialects and variations in accents within a country, reasons such as colonization, immigration and trade have also brought different languages together in several parts of the world.

We are now living in a highly globalized world. For this reason itself, people are also no longer monolingual as they need to interact with people from other nationalities. It is difficult to say if anyone can actually be called 'monolingual' any longer. Several 'lingua francas' have emerged as well that help people from different nationalities or speakers of different languages communicate with each other adopting one lingua franca as a common language. In India, where linguistic diversity and linguistic variability are a social reality, people use several languages

quite naturally and effortlessly while interacting with each other. English in India, spoken in all kinds of ways depending on varying abilities, is also used as a lingua franca. It is widely and habitually used by people when mother tongues are different in order to facilitate communication between them. It has become a normal requirement in today's world that people speak several languages, whether for purposes of travel, business, school education, social interactions or politics.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Name any two countries besides India which are multilingual. Which languages are spoken there? What makes these countries multilingual?

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- 2) What is a lingua franca? You may refer to the key words for your answer.

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4.3 LANGUAGE FAMILIES IN INDIA

One of the primary reasons why India is called a multilingual country is that more than 1600 languages are spoken here that belong to one of the four predominant language families. These are:

The Indo-Aryan language family: languages belonging to this family are a subgroup of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. Some of the languages that belong to this family are Hindi, Bangla, Gujarati, Punjabi, Marathi, Konkani, Sindhi, Assamese, Maithili, Oriya. According to the 2001 Census of India, 78% of our population belongs to this language family. Not all the languages in this group are recognized by our Constitution. For example, Bhojpuri and Magahi are some examples of languages not recognized.

The Dravidian language family: languages belonging to this family are mainly spoken in southern India and parts of eastern and central India. Kannada, Malyalam, Tamil and Telugu belong to this group. Approximately 19% (2001 Census) of our population speaks one of the languages of this family.

The Tibeto-Burman language family: a subgroup of Sino-Tibetan language family, its speakers in India constitute only 1-1.5%% (2001 Census) of the total

population in India. It's spoken primarily in the north east region of India with sixty six as the total number of languages spoken in India. Bodo, Koch, Dhimal, Kuki, Lepcha, Burmese, Naga are some of the languages spoken there.

The Austro-Asiatic language family: formally known as Mon-Khmer. Languages belonging to this family are scattered throughout India. About twenty one Munda languages and Khasi spoken in Meghalaya belong to this group. Its speakers comprise only 1% (2001 Census) of our population.

An interesting fact about India is that despite its very diverse and distinct language families, there is linguistic convergence. Indian languages are similar to each other in their structure and therefore share characteristics that are common between them. It is because of this reason researchers are fascinated looking at India as **a linguistic area**. As can be noticed from the brief description of the language families, the Indo-Aryan language family and Dravidian language family together constitute 97% of our speakers. With the exception of Khasi that has an SVO (subject verb object) word structure, all Indian languages follow the SOV (subject object verb) word order. Borrowing and lending of words has also happened historically between language families, making certain vocabulary common.

Some examples of characteristics of Hindi as a SOV language:

- It follows the SOV word order. (*riya seb khaati hai*: Riya eats an apple.)
- Adjectives precede nouns. (*lal seb*: red apple)
- Numerals precede nouns. (*2 seb*; 2 apples)
- Postpositions follow the nouns. (*mez par kitaab rakhi hai*: The book is lying on the table.)
- Interrogative questions begin with 'K' words. (*Kyon; Kaise; Kab; Kahan; Kisliye; Kon*: Why; How; When; Where; Why; Who)
- The direct object precedes the indirect object. (*maine seb ko chaku se kaata*: I cut the apple with a knife)
- Time adverb precedes place adverb. (*main kal chhe baje agra jaa rahi hun*: I'm going to Agra at 6 o'clock tomorrow.)

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What do you understand by the term 'language family'? Which language families do the languages you know belong to?

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- 2) Give at least two examples from any two Indian languages besides Hindi to show that they share similarities because of SOV word order.

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4.4 THE PERVASIVENESS OF MULTILINGUALISM IN INDIA

The presence of four language families in our country is an indicator of the fact that our country is multilingual. There is a popular saying, ‘Kos-kos par badle paani, chaar kos par baani’ (Just as the taste of water changes every kilometer, so do the languages every few kilometers in India.) This aptly describes the multilingual character of our country. If you look at your own linguistic repertoire and some of those around you, you would realize that everyone knows at least 2 or more languages. The multiplicity of languages is all around us: on TV and radio channels, print media (magazines, newspapers), movies, songs, books, stories, bill boards, and as mediums of instruction. While the constitution of India recognizes only 22 languages, it is well-known that besides the 1600 + languages, many are not accounted for or are clubbed under one language. For example, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Awadhi and many others have been grouped under Hindi.

In a study conducted by Gumperz and Wilson way back in 1971 in Kupwar, a small village of about 3,000 inhabitants in Maharashtra, they found convergence among the four languages spoken in the village. Marathi, Urdu, Kannada and Telegu were distributed based on caste. The highest caste, the Jains, spoke Kannada and the lowest caste, the scheduled caste spoke Marathi. The rope makers in the village spoke Telegu and the Muslims Urdu. Since they all needed to speak to each other, syntax of all the four languages converged to create a lingua franca that was dominated by Marathi as the language for inter group communication. What we find in India is that despite widespread heterogeneity, communication has never been a problem.

Agnihotri (2014) in his article, Multilinguality, Education and Harmony suggests that we should stop looking at multilingualism in an additive manner of L1 + L2 +L3 in which languages are learnt sequentially or simultaneously. He argues for the concept of ‘multilinguality’ which is rooted in variability and fluidity. Such a concept rejects demarcations between multiple languages that a person may know and looks at language boundaries as porous and free flowing. He firmly believes that language boundaries that we create are artificial and that languages we know flow effortlessly into each other. A few examples that demonstrate such free flow between languages have been given in the first section. In other words, multilinguality equips us to be at ease when using multiple languages and is constitutive of us being human. It is for this reason that despite multiplicity of languages in our country, communication never ceases. Whether we mix, switch or develop lingua francas, we continue to use the multiple languages we know.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Choose any two regions or states in India besides your own. Find out the languages that are spoken in those regions or states. Which language families do the languages you learnt about belong to?

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- 2) Although your command in the languages you know may vary, when and how do you make use of the languages you know. Give examples to illustrate.

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4.5 MULTILINGUALISM AS A RESOURCE

Several parameters such as your country, dress, food, culture define your identity and amongst them, language is one such significant parameter. But what happens when you know several languages that are part of your verbal repertoire? Well, it seems linguistic identities are no longer fixed but flexible, multiple and culturally constructed. To maintain multiple identities means that one can belong to several speech communities at the same time. This is one of the reasons why the phrase 'a global citizen' has become trendy these days. In countries where large population of immigrants have settled in, there is always pressure to shift towards the dominant language. However, even in such cases, evidence shows that ethnic communities, in US for example, try hard to maintain their languages and therefore their identities.

In our country, although we take great pride in being multilingual, and accept that it can lead to metacognitive awareness and scholastic achievement, we forget this reality in our classrooms. Our textbooks, education policies, curriculum, teachers are all geared towards homogenizing our language classrooms. The linguistic backgrounds of school children is often ignored and a standard language is imposed as a medium of instruction. Children are not given the freedom to use the multiple languages they already know in their classrooms. Unfortunately, this has led to further alienation and done major damage to the identity of those children who are already marginalized and are socially disadvantaged. If we begin to appreciate the multilingual diversity in our classrooms, we may be able to follow the path of equality, social justice and tolerance. A language teacher

can play an important role in using multilingualism as a resource in her class. Whether she is teaching a poem or grammar, she can elicit multiple language data from children in her class through translation. Once the data from several languages is on the board, children will be able to observe similarities across Indian languages and generalize their own rules. Such a class would be democratic as several languages get represented and no language assumes a powerful status as a standard language. Multilingualism has to be the new norm in our classrooms.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Find speakers of any two Indian languages along with Hindi to translate the following questions given in English. Observe the data and write down the similarities that you notice amongst Indian languages and the differences you see with English:
 - a) Where are you going tomorrow?
 - b) Who are you going with?
 - c) Why are you going?
 - d) When will you return to Mumbai?
 - e) Which cities will you cross?
 - f) How are you going?

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

India is a multilingual country. It is characterized by linguistic diversity and heterogeneity. It is not unusual to find people in our country who speak more than two languages and maintain multiple identities. One of the main reasons for our multilingual character is because of the four language families that exist in our country. Although distinct from each other, they share phonological, morphological and syntactic similarities. It is time we started using multilingualism as a resource in our classrooms so that we lay a path of social justice, especially for those marginalized and socially deprived people whose languages are not valued outside or inside our classrooms.

4.7 KEY WORDS

language family : is a group of languages related through descent from a common ancestral language or parental language, called the proto-language of that family. The term “family” reflects the tree model of language origination in historical linguistics.

lingua franca	:	a language that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.
multilingualism	:	is the use of more than one language, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. It is believed that multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population.
verbal repertoire	:	is the range of or set of language varieties used in the speaking and writing practices of an individual or a speech community.
India as a linguistic area	:	a term used by Emmaneu to show linguistic convergence in India where languages despite belonging to different language families show common features.

4.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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4.9 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

both 1 & 2 are open-ended questions.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) open-ended
- 2) Lingua Franca: a language that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Language family: is a group of languages related through descent from a common ancestral language or parental language, called the proto-language of that family. The term “family” reflects the tree model of language origination in historical linguistics.
- 2) open-ended

Check Your progress-4

1 & 2 are open-ended questions

Check Your Progress-5

- 1) open-ended



