

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Linguistics

1.1.1 Definition of linguistics

Linguistics is jokingly dubbed “rich men’s game”. But actually, it is the game of everybody, because all of us are involved in language and more or less related to linguistics. Every normal person is using language all the time one way or another, for even when he/she is not speaking or writing, he/she may be talking to himself/herself or thinking in language. So nobody is too far away from language. However, not many people ever stop and ask what language is. For that reason, linguistics is not very familiar to many people. *Linguistics* can be defined as the scientific or systematic study of language. It is a science in the sense that it scientifically studies the rules, systems and principles of human languages. It deals with a wide range of linguistic phenomena, analyzes them, and makes general statements about them. Therefore, in its operations and statements, linguistics is always guided by the three canons of science: (i) exhaustiveness: it strives for thorough-goingness in the examination of relevant materials; (ii) consistency, that is, there should be no contradiction between different parts of the total statement; (iii) economy: other things being equal, a shorter statement or analysis is to be preferred to one that is longer or more complex.

The subject matter of linguistics is all natural languages, living or dead. For living languages it is concerned with the study of both their spoken and written forms, while for dead languages with the study of their written forms. Linguistics as a branch of science, a pilot science as it is usually said, tries to answer the



following basic questions: “What is language?” and “How does language work?” You may say that they are simple questions that everyone can answer. However, if you want to be scientific in your answers, you will find they are far from easy. Since we use language every day without thinking, we do not bother to ask what it actually is. We need a separate branch of science to tell us what language is and how it works. Linguistics studies the origin, growth, organization, nature and development of language and discovers the general rules and principles governing language. It employs scientific methods to observe, record and analyze all the phenomena related to language. It tries to explain how language has become what it is and why it works the way it does. Young as it is, linguistics has offered many descriptions of language and explanations or theories about it. Today it is still growing and generating many sub-disciplines.

Linguistics has two main purposes. One is that it studies the nature of language and tries to establish a theory of language, and describes languages in the light of the theory established. The other is that it examines all the forms of language in general and seeks a scientific understanding of the ways in which it is organized to fulfill the needs it serves and the functions it performs in human life.

1.1.2 Linguistics versus traditional grammar

Some people probably think that linguistics is only a new name for traditional grammar. But that is not the case. Traditional grammar is usually based on earlier grammars of Latin or Greek and applied to some other languages, often inappropriately. For example, some grammarians stated that English had six cases because Latin had six cases. Traditional grammar emphasizes such matters as correctness, linguistic purism, literary excellence, the use of Latin models and the priority of the written language. Although there has been a trend towards using grammars which incorporate more modern approaches to language descriptions and language teaching, some schools still use traditional grammars.

Linguistics differs from traditional grammar at least in three basic ways.

First, linguistics describes languages and does not lay down rules of

correctness. Linguists are interested in what is said, not what they think ought to be said. So they are often said to be descriptive, not prescriptive.

A second important way in which linguistics differs from traditional grammar is that linguists regard the spoken language as primary, not the written. It is believed that speech came into being first for any human language and the writing system came along much later.

Thirdly, traditional grammar is based on Latin and it tries to impose the Latin categories and structures on other languages, while linguistics describes each language on its own merits.

1.1.3 Use of studying linguistics

It is believed to be desirable to state very simply the use of knowing linguistics. One famous scholar says that language is an interesting subject to study on its own right, for the simple reason that everybody uses it every day. It is unbelievable that we know very little about something we are so familiar with. Just a few questions will arouse our interest in language. Why should we call the thing we sit on *chair*? Can't we call chair *table* and table *chair*? How is it that children don't seem to make a big effort in learning their first language while we adults have to work very hard to learn a second language? Why can we talk about yesterday and last year while cats and dogs never seem to make noises about their past experience? Do you think we can think as clearly without language as with language? Does language determine what we think or thought determines what we say? These questions make us curious about language and linguistics can satisfy our curiosity. To seek the answer to any of these questions is a good reason for studying linguistics.

For a student of language, some knowledge of linguistics is of both interest and importance. To know the general properties of language can help the student to have an overview of human language which in turn will stop him from asking unnecessary questions. With a little linguistic knowledge, the student will not take everything in his mother tongue for granted and question the existence of anything different from his own language. He will understand that human languages have important features in common while differ greatly in many



details. He will not be surprised by the facts of a new language and will accept them as they are. A student may take linguistics as a compulsory course, but later he may also major in it in his M.A. program. In that case this introduction to linguistics will be essential to his future career, that is, this course might put him onto the path leading to his final profession either as a teacher of foreign languages or as a researcher of linguistics.

For a teacher of foreign languages, he will definitely benefit a great deal from the knowledge of linguistics. He will learn about not only how language is pronounced or structured, but also how it should be presented to learners. He will know not only how each level of the language system is related to other levels, but also how language is closely related to many things outside itself, such as the mind, the brain, and society, among other things. He will know language teaching is essentially informed by the findings from linguistic research and the development of language teaching theories is closely related with, and, if we may say so, heavily dependent on the development of linguistic research. Teachers of foreign languages are the first consumers of linguistic research findings.

For a researcher, there is even more scope for displaying his abilities. First, there are various branches of linguistics (as you will see later in the book), each of which is equally fascinating and challenging. Secondly, linguistic research is going deeper and deeper, often from mere descriptions to logical and philosophical explanations. Thirdly, linguistics is becoming more and more interdisciplinary, which means that it draws on the findings of other disciplines while it also sheds light on their research. This makes linguistics both interesting and demanding as a field of scientific enquiry and it expects researchers to be well-informed of the latest developments of its neighboring disciplines. The above points will become self-evident as the book unfolds itself.

1.1.4 Scope of linguistics

Linguistics is a comparatively young science but it has developed several important branches. The major branches of linguistics include *phonetics*, *phonology*, *morphology*, *syntax*, *semantics*, and *pragmatics*, which can be called

microlinguistics. They are fields of enquiry purely about language itself.

Phonetics is the scientific study of speech sounds. It studies how speech sounds are articulated, transmitted, and received. It is a pure science and examines speech sounds in general.

Phonology is the study of how speech sounds function in a language. It studies the ways speech sounds are organized. It can be seen as the functional phonetics of a particular language.

Morphology is the study of the formation of words. It is a branch of linguistics which breaks words into morphemes. It can be considered as the grammar of words as syntax is the grammar of sentences.

Syntax deals with the combination of words into phrases, clauses and sentences. It is the grammar of sentence construction.

Semantics is a branch of linguistics which is concerned with the study of meaning in all its formal aspects. Words have several types of meaning. A sentence needs to be well formed both syntactically and semantically. The sentence "Mary married the Mickey Mouse", for example, is syntactically well formed but semantically ill formed, for we know that a lady cannot marry the Mickey Mouse. Semantics is concerned with such information.

Pragmatics can be defined as the study of language in use. It deals with how speakers use language in ways which cannot be predicted from linguistic knowledge alone, and how hearers arrive at the intended meaning of speakers. In a broad sense, pragmatics studies the principles observed by human beings when they communicate with one another. We can roughly say that pragmatics takes care of the meaning that is not covered by semantics. So people use the formula as its definition: PRAGMATICS = MEANING – SEMANTICS.

The branches of linguistics above are at the very center of its scope. However, language can be also studied in relation to something else. If we study language in relation to society, we get a new branch of linguistics called *sociolinguistics*. If we do so in relation to psychology, we get *psycholinguistics*. These branches of linguistics can be called *macrolinguistics*. Here, for the sake of brevity, we just list some of them:

Sociolinguistics studies the relations between language and society: how

social factors influence the structure and use of language. It studies such matters as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, standard and non-standard forms of language, the patterns and needs of national language use, and so on. Another name for sociolinguistics is the *sociology of language*. Linguistic and social problems are so closely related that linguistics itself has sometimes been regarded as a “social” science.

Psycholinguistics is the study of language and mind: the mental structures and processes which are involved in the acquisition, comprehension and production of language. Perhaps the most well-developed part of psycholinguistics is concerned with language acquisition in children, although there is a growing amount of work being done on second language acquisition and learning. People have also attempted to study such things as speech perception, comprehension and production. These topics of research are intrinsically bound up with the broader psychological studies of cognition and memory. We will return to the discussion of psycholinguistics in Chapter 9.

Related to psycholinguistics is the study of language processing and language representation in the brain, which is known as *neurolinguistics* or *neurological linguistics*. It typically studies the disturbances of language comprehension and production caused by the damage of certain areas of the brain. Now it has been found that damage in Broca’s area will cause non-fluent speech, full of broken sentences consisting mainly of content words. Damage in Wernicke’s area will cause severely weakened comprehension of words and sentences especially in speech.

Stylistics is the study of how literary effects can be related to linguistic features. It usually refers to the study of written language, including literary texts, but it also investigates spoken language sometimes. It is concerned with the choices that are available to a writer and the reasons why particular forms and expressions are used rather than others. Since stylistics is the scientific study of literary style, it can be called the “science of literature”.

Discourse analysis, or *text linguistics* is the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which language is used. It deals with how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units such

as paragraphs, conversations and interviews, and the various devices used by speakers and writers when they connect single sentences together into a coherent whole. The developments of discourse analysis have been carried out on *classroom discourse analysis*, *critical discourse analysis*, and *cognitive discourse analysis*. We will examine all these in Chapter 7.

Computational linguistics is an approach to linguistics which employs mathematical techniques, often with the help of a computer. It includes the analysis of language data, the research on machine-aided translation, electronic production of artificial speech and the automatic recognition of human speech. It has produced programs for collecting and evaluating large amounts of language data for making frequency word lists, for automatically indexing, and for producing concordances (key words in contexts).

Cognitive linguistics is an approach to the analysis of natural language that focuses on language as an instrument for organizing, processing, and conveying information. It is sometimes called a paradigm or a school of linguistics. The analysis of the conceptual and experiential basis of linguistic categories is of primary importance within cognitive linguistics: it primarily considers language as a system of categories. Therefore, the main topics that cognitive linguistics is interested in are categories and categorization, conceptual metaphor and metonymy, iconicity, and grammaticalization, which will be studied in detail in Chapter 10.

Apart from the different branches of linguistics, there are some distinctions of linguistics, such as *functional linguistics* versus *formal linguistics*, *theoretical linguistics* versus *applied linguistics*. *Corpus linguistics* (linguistic description based on the extensive accumulation of naturally occurring language data and its analysis by computers), *forensic linguistics* (the examination of linguistic evidence for legal purposes), *mathematical linguistics* (the study of the mathematical properties of language, usually employing concepts of a statistical or algebraic kind), *anthropological linguistics* (the study of language in cross-cultural settings), and so on and so forth.

Applied linguistics is primarily concerned with the application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to the elucidation of language problems which

have arisen in other areas of experience. The most well-developed branch of applied linguistics is the learning and teaching of foreign languages and sometimes the term is used as if this were the only field involved. But several other fields of application have emerged in recent years, including the linguistic analysis of language disorders, which is called *clinical linguistics*, and the use of language in mother-tongue education, which is called *educational linguistics*, and developments in lexicology, translation and stylistics. It seems that there is no clear-cut boundary between applied linguistics and the various interdisciplinary branches of linguistics, such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. On the other hand, as these branches develop their own theoretical foundations, the distinction between “pure” and “applied” is becoming obvious.

The list of branches of linguistics above should have shown at least one thing: Linguistics is not only something about grammar. It is certainly true that grammar is an important part of linguistics, but linguistics deals with many other things too. Since linguistics has a very wide scope which overlaps with many other subjects and fields, it is becoming more and more interdisciplinary.

1.2 Language

1.2.1 Definition of language

Language is one of the unique possessions of human beings. It is one of our most articulated means of expressing ideas and thoughts. But what is language? It is far from easy to answer this simple question, because people often use the word “language” in more senses than one, for example, “the language of music”, “bad language”, “Mark Twain’s language”, “body language” and so on.

However, this does not mean that we cannot give a general definition of language. Linguists have offered various definitions. Yet none succeeds in satisfying all. According to the important features of languages that most linguists agreed on, a generally acceptable definition is: *Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.*

Language is a *system*—elements in it are not arranged and combined

randomly, but according to some rules and principles. Language is *arbitrary*—there is no intrinsic connection between the word (e.g. *pen*) and the thing (e.g. what we write with). Language is *vocal*—the primary medium for all languages is sound. Language is used for *human communication*—it is human-specific, very different from systems of animal communication.

1.2.2 Origin of language

The origin of language is a puzzling question. Nothing can be definitely said about it. No one can say how and when language originated. One thing can be said that a baby is born not with a particular language. A newborn child cannot speak, but gradually it acquires language. One cannot speak if he is brought up in a non-human community since his birth. So the origin of language is such a problem that baffles our mind and defies our imagination.

In the history of the evolution of language, we come across several speculations about the origin of language. According to Plato, there was a “perfect” language, which all human beings were striving to rediscover. Some thought that God said: “Let there be language” and there was language. Socrates held that imitation of natural sounds was the basis for the origin of language. Some others speculated that man’s instinctive response to certain external stimuli was the basis for the birth of language. In any case, the language of primitive people and the history of language in recent times can shed some light on how language came about. Linguists have put forward hypothetical explanations. The German scholar M. Müller (1823—1900) suggested a mystic connection between sound and meaning: Human speech developed from primitive man giving vocal expression to the objects he encountered. This is known as “Ding-Dong Theory”. Otto Jespersen (1860—1943) held that language developed from primitive ritual songs of praise, and this is called the “Sing-Song Theory”. L. H. Gray’s (1875—1955) “Pooh-Pooh” or “Exclamation” or “Interjectional” Theory traced language back to interjections, which express the speaker’s emotions. L. Noiré (1847—1889) explained the origin of speech in terms of the cries uttered, during strain of work, which is known as the “Yo-He-Ho Theory”. R. Paget (1869—1955) claimed that language came from the combination of



certain gestures and tongue movements. This is called the “Ta-Ta Theory”. Various explanations have been given in terms of imitation of animal cries and other sounds heard in nature. This is known as the “Bow-Wow Theory”. No single theory is accepted by everybody; the combination of them all might explain much better the emergence of language.

But one point here we must be aware of is that man’s stepping into social life, leaving behind his primitive life is one of the major factors of the creation of language. The evolution of man’s social life paved the way for the evolution of language. Language does not exist where there is no society. Society is both the creator and the container of language. Therefore, we can say that language originates, grows and develops in society, even though its exact process is not fully revealed to us yet.

1.2.3 Design features of language

Language is human specific. All human languages have certain characteristics in common and linguists have identified these characteristics as defining features of human language. These features, now called design features, are found utterly lacking in animal communication and thus set human language apart from animal cry systems. The following seven design features of human language have been identified by the eminent American linguist C. F. Hockett (1958): *arbitrariness, duality, productivity, interchangeability, displacement, specialization, and cultural transmission.*

(i) *Arbitrariness*

Human language is arbitrary. This refers to the fact that there is no logical or intrinsic connection between a particular sound and the meaning it is associated with. There is no reason, for example, why English should use the sounds /dog/ to refer to the animal dog, or why Chinese should use “gou” to refer to the same animal. The relationship between the sounds and their meaning is quite accidental. Of course, onomatopoeic words (words that imitate natural sounds) such as *quack-quack* and *bang* are exceptions, but words like these are relatively few compared with the total number of words in a language.

(ii) *Duality*

Animals who use vocal signals have a stock of basic sounds which vary according to species. A cow has less than ten, a chicken has around twenty, and a fox over thirty. Dolphins have between twenty and thirty, and so do gorillas and chimpanzees. Most animals can use each basic sound only once. In other words, the number of messages an animal can send is restricted to the number of basic sounds, or occasionally the basic sounds plus a few simple combinations.

Human language works rather differently. It operates on two levels of structure. At one level are elements which have no meaning in themselves but which combine to form units at another level which do have meaning. For instance, human language has a number of sound units, or phonemes, but each phoneme is normally meaningless in isolation. It becomes meaningful only when it is combined with other phonemes. That is, sounds such as *d*, *g*, *f*, *o*, mean nothing separately. They normally take on meaning only when they are combined in certain ways, as in *dog*, *fog*, and *god*. This organization of language into two levels—a level of sounds which combine into a second level of larger units—is called duality or double articulation.

(iii) *Productivity*

Productivity or creativity refers to man's linguistic ability which enables him to produce and understand an infinitely large number of sentences in our native language, including the sentences which were never heard before. This feature equips human beings with the ability to produce completely new utterances and ideas. Most animal cries are limited to a few, a dozen at most. There is no productivity to speak of in those cries.

For example, dance is an effective system of communication for bees. It is capable, in principle, of infinite different messages, like human language; but unlike human language, the system is confined to a single subject—food source. An experimenter forced a bee to walk to the food source. When the bee returned to the hive, it indicated a distance twenty-five times farther away than the food source actually was. The bee had no way of communicating the special circumstances in its message. This absence of creativity makes bees' dance qualitatively different from human language. Among certain species of spiders



there is a complex system for courtship. The male spider, before he approaches his ladylove, goes through series of elaborate gestures to inform her that he is indeed a spider and a suitable mate, and not a crumb or a fly to be eaten. These gestures are invariant. One never finds a creative spider changing or adding to the courtship ritual of his species. The robin is creative in his ability to sing the same thing in many ways, but not creative in his ability to use the same units of the system to express many different messages with different meanings. Dolphins, despite their intelligence and many clicks, whistles and squawks, seem to be confined to communicating about the same things again and again. And even the clever vervet monkey, who is claimed to be able to make thirty-six different vocal sounds, is obliged to repeat these over and over.

(iv) *Interchangeability*

Interchangeability or *reciprocity* refers to the fact that man can both produce and receive messages, and his roles as a speaker and a hearer can be exchanged at ease. In the animal world gibbons and bees are endowed with the ability to produce and receive messages. This communicative ability is found lacking in other animals. Some male birds, for example, possess calls which females do not have. This feature of linguistic interchangeability distinguishes human language from animals' communication.

(v) *Displacement*

Displacement is a property of language enabling people to talk about things remote either in space or in time. Most animals can only communicate about things in the immediate situation, but human beings can communicate about things that are absent as easily as about things that are present. By virtue of this feature man can talk about events, locations, and objects which are far removed from the present time and context. He can narrate events, for instance, that took place a long time ago and at a distant place. Displacement occasionally occurs in the animal world, for example, in the communication of honey bees. If a worker bee finds a new source of nectar, it returns to the hive and performs a complex dance in order to inform the other bees of the exact location of the nectar, which may be several miles away. But even bees are restricted in this ability, because they can inform each other only about nectar.

(vi) *Specialization*

Specialization refers to the fact that man does not have a total physical involvement in the act of communication. Speech is a specialized activity. We use it in a detached manner. We can talk about an exciting experience while engaged in activities completely detached from the subject under discussion. For example, a mother can tell a story to her child while slicing up a cake. Animals can only respond to a stimulus. A bee in a bee dance, for instance, is totally involved physically in the communication process.

(vii) *Cultural transmission*

Language is culturally transmitted. It cannot be transmitted through heredity. A human being brought up in isolation simply does not acquire language, as is demonstrated by the studies of children brought up by animals without human contact. Animals transmit their cries through heredity, that is, simply from parent to child. A cat can make cats' cries not long after its birth, but a human baby does not speak any language at birth. What language the baby is going to speak is determined by the culture he is born into. A Chinese baby born and brought up in London by an English family will speak English, while an English child brought up in Beijing by a Chinese aunt will speak Chinese.

Perhaps, there are some other design features of human language. But the above features are adequate to show that human language is sharply distinguished from animal communication systems.

1.2.4 Functions of language

We use language for an almost infinite number of purposes, from writing letters to gossiping with our friends, making speeches and talking to ourselves in the mirror. But the primary function of language is to transmit information and to convey commands, feelings and emotions. That is, language is a tool of communication. The term "communication" can be used to cover much of the function of language. This function can be further divided into more specific functions. "Do you have a knife?" for example, could be an offer to lend a knife or a request to borrow one. Linguists have used different terms for different specific functions. Here are some of the major categories:

Phatic function/communion: Language is used to establish an atmosphere or maintain social contact between the speaker and the hearer. Greetings, farewells, and comments on the weather serve this function. For example, the expressions such as “How do you do?” and “Ah, here you are”, do not convey any meaning, but are used to establish a common sentiment between the speaker and the hearer.

Directive function: Language is used to get the hearer to do something. Most imperative sentences are of this function. For example, the sentence “Close your book and listen to me carefully!” performs a directive function.

Informative function: Language is used to tell something, to give information, or to reason things out. Declarative sentences serve this function. For instance, the symbol “Road Closed” on a road has such an informative function.

Interrogative function: Language is used to ask for information from others. All questions expecting replies serve this function. “What’s your idea?”, “What time is it now?”, “What is it like?”, “How old are you?”, and the like are quite commonly used to perform the interrogative function. However, rhetorical questions do not have the interrogative function, such as Shelly’s famous line “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

Expressive function: Language is used to reveal the speaker’s attitudes and feelings. Ejaculations serve this function, such as “My God!” and “Good heavens!”

Evocative function: Language is used to create certain feelings in the hearers. Jokes, advertising, and propaganda serve this function.

Performative function: Language is used to do things or to perform acts. The judge’s imprisonment sentences, the president’s declaration of war or the Queen’s naming of a ship, etc., serve this function. At a meeting, for instance, as soon as the chairman says “I declare the meeting open”, the meeting has started.

Different linguists have characterized these functions differently. R. Jakobson, for example, has identified six functions for language, while M. A. K. Halliday has said that children’s language has seven functions and adults’ language has three metafunctions. We will examine Halliday’s three metafunctions in more detail in Chapter 4.

1.3 Some Major Concepts in Linguistics

1.3.1 Descriptive and prescriptive grammars

Most modern linguistics is descriptive. It attempts to describe what people actually say. This is a contrast with the study of language in previous centuries. Traditional grammars told people how to use a language. They contained statements like “do not split infinitives” or “do not end sentences with a preposition”. For example, it was felt to be incorrect to say “to quickly go” or “a person who I play with”. These are things which people can and do say nowadays. Many such judgments were subjective and a matter of taste. As traditional grammars tried to lay down rules, they are often called prescriptive. Of course, this does not deny the overall importance of traditional grammars. It is simply one aspect of their construction.

To put it simply, descriptive grammars attempt to tell what is in the language, while prescriptive grammars tell people what should be in the language. Most contemporary linguists believe that whatever occurs naturally in the language should be described. Certain forms are used more regularly than others and by different people. Though some forms occur less frequently, they should not be ignored. They can all be recorded and explained as aspects of the language since they are actually used. Language changes and develops. This process cannot be stopped by giving rules to show that new forms or arrangements are wrong. The changes should be observed and described. This does not deny that languages have rules. They obviously do, otherwise we would not understand each other. On the other hand, no single rule or expression is necessarily there forever.

1.3.2 Synchronic and diachronic linguistics

Language can be studied at a given point in time or over time. When we study language at one particular time, it is called *synchronic linguistics*. When we study language developments through time, it is called *diachronic* or *historical linguistics*. Synchronic linguistics focuses on the state of language at any point in history while diachronic linguistics focuses on the differences in

two or more than two states of language over decades or centuries.

In the following diagram, axis AB is the synchronic, static axis. It can intersect at any point with XY. The diachronic axis XY has been considered dynamic.



But to study language diachronically relies on the synchronic study of language because linguists will fail to make any valid statements about linguistic change without good descriptions of a language. Hence, synchronic linguistics and diachronic linguistics are correlated in the valid study of language.

1.3.3 *Langue and parole*

Early last century, the famous linguist F. de Saussure made an important distinction between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* refers to the abstract linguistic system shared by all the members of a speech community. *Parole* refers to particular realizations of *langue*. *Langue* is the social, conventional side of language, while *parole* is individualized speech. *Langue* is the code, and *parole* is the message. *Parole* is the concrete manifestation of language either through speech or writing. *Langue* is the abstract knowledge necessary for speaking, listening, writing and reading. It is relatively stable and systematic, whereas *parole* is more variable and may change according to contextual factors. *Parole* and *langue* together constitute language.

1.3.4 Competence and performance

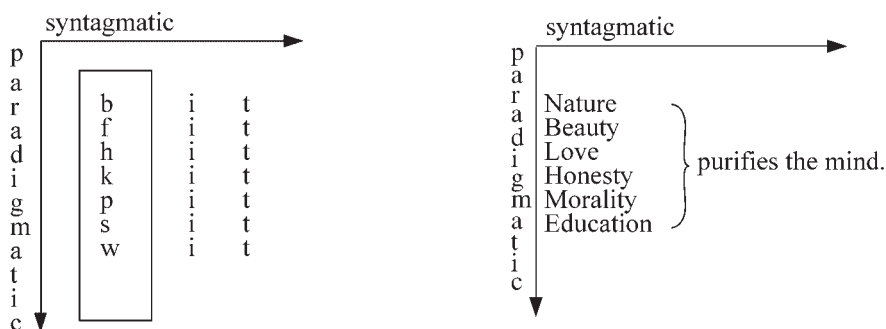
A distinction comparable to *langue* and *parole* is made by the well-known American linguist Noam Chomsky. He distinguishes competence and performance so as to idealize language data and to define the scope of linguistic study. According to Chomsky, competence refers to the knowledge that native

speakers have of their language as a system of abstract formal relations, while performance refers to their actual linguistic behavior, that is, the actual use of this knowledge.

Chomsky's distinction apparently corresponds in some degree to that of Saussure. It represents a similar classification of knowledge and behavior and a similar dichotomy of the scope of linguistic inquiry. However, their views are not exactly the same. Chomsky's competence is a psychological construct and de Saussure's *langue* is a set of social conventions. There are other minor differences, but perhaps the underlying considerations are the same. Whether we adopt a psychological view or a sociological one, the principle is to abstract rules from immediately observable language use and try to describe the system governing particular examples of speaking or writing.

1.3.5 Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations

Saussure has put forward another pair of concepts: syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. The former refers to the horizontal relationship between linguistic elements, which form linear sequences. The latter means the vertical relationship between forms, which might occupy the same particular place in a structure. The following diagrams might give us a vivid picture of the two concepts.



From the diagrams above we can see clearly that syntagmatic relations are actually positional relations, that is, the sequential arrangement of smaller linguistic forms into larger linguistic forms, e.g. the arrangement of words and



phrases into sentences. If words and phrases do not occur in a recognizable order with respect to each other, a sentence will be ungrammatical, for instance:

- (1) *purifies love the mind.
- (2) *mind the purifies love.

Whereas, paradigmatic relations are relations of substitution, that is, linguistic forms (e.g. letters, words and phrases) can be substituted for each other in the same position in a word or sentence. For example, we can substitute “f”, “h”, “k”, “p”, “s”, or “w” for “b” in the first diagram, and “beauty”, “love”, “honesty”, “morality”, or “education” for “nature” in the second diagram.

1.3.6 Functionalism and formalism

Generally speaking, schools of linguistics can be divided into two major camps: One is *functionalism*, and the other is *formalism*. Functionalism or functional linguistics refers to the study of the forms of language in reference to their social function in communication. It considers the individual as a social being and investigates the way in which she/he acquires language and uses it in order to communicate with others in her or his social environment. Functionalism tends to explain the forms of language by attributing a determining role of its function. This function is presumed to be communication. It holds that the use of language influences its form. Therefore, linguistics should study the functions of language. Most contemporary linguistics in Europe since the Prague School is functional.

Formalism or formal linguistics is the study of the abstract forms of language and their internal relations. It fixes on the forms of languages as evidence of the universals without considering how these forms function in communication and the ways of social life in different communities. The most outstanding representative of formalism is Noam Chomsky’s transformational-generative grammar (TG grammar), which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. Define the following terms briefly.

linguistics

language

arbitrariness

duality	competence	performance
stylistics	phatic communion	functionalism
formalism	synchronic linguistics	diachronic linguistics

2. If language is partially defined as communication, can we call the noises that dogs make language? Why or why not?
3. One of the main features of our human languages is arbitrariness. Can you briefly explain what this feature refers to? Support your argument with examples.
4. What kind of evidence supports the idea that language is culturally transmitted?
5. Point out three major differences between linguistics and traditional grammar.
6. What is the difference between a prescriptive and a descriptive approach to language?
7. Distinguish between synchronic and diachronic linguistics.
8. A wolf is able to express subtle gradations of emotion by different positions of the ears, the lips, and the tail. There are eleven postures of the tail that express such emotions as self-confidence, confident threat, lack of tension, uncertain threat, depression, defensiveness, active submission, and complete submission. This system seems to be complex. Suppose there were a thousand different emotions that the wolf could express in this way. Would you then say a wolf had a language similar to man's? If not, why not?

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Supplementary Readings

Text One

Direction: The following text is about the nature and convention of language. Which one do you think is more reasonable? Why or why not? (J. Lyons. *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977: 4—6)

The Greek philosophers debated whether language was governed by “nature” or “convention”. This opposition of “nature” and “convention” was a commonplace of Greek philosophical speculation. To say that a particular institution was “natural” was to imply that it had its origin in eternal and immutable principles outside man himself (and was therefore inviolable); to say that it was

“conventional” implied that it was merely the result of custom and tradition (that is, of some tacit agreement, or “social contract”, among the members of the community—a “contract” which, since it was made by men, could be broken by men).

In the discussion of language, the distinction between “nature” and “convention” was made to turn principally upon the question whether there was any necessary connexion between the meaning of a word and its form. Extreme adherents of the “naturalist” school, like Cratylus, whose views Plato reports in his dialog of that name, maintained that all words were indeed “naturally” appropriate to the things they signified. Although this might not always be evident to the layman, they would say, it could be demonstrated by the philosopher able to discern the “reality” that lay behind the appearance of things. Thus was born the practice of conscious and deliberate etymology. The term itself (being formed from the Greek *etymo*-signifying “true” or “real”) betrays its philosophical origin. To lay bare the origin of a word and thereby its “true” meaning was to reveal one of the truths of “nature”.

Various ways were recognized in which the form of a word might be “naturally” appropriate to its meaning. First of all, there was the relatively small set of words, like *neigh*, *bleat*, *hoot*, *crash*, *tinkle*, etc. (to use examples from English rather than Greek), which to some degree or other were “imitative” of the sounds they referred to. A different, though related, category comprised words (*cuckoo*, *peewit*, etc.) which were “imitative” of a particular kind of sound, but which denoted the source of the sound, rather than the sound itself. In both cases there is an obvious “natural” connexion between the physical form of the word and what it signifies. The technical term employed for words belonging to these two categories, and still used in this sense, was *onomatopoeia*. This was simply the Greek word for “the creation of names”. The fact that it was restricted by grammarians to words which “imitate” the sounds they denote reflects the view maintained by the Greek “naturalists” that such words form the basic set of “names” from which language was developed. The fundamental relationship between a word and its meaning was that of “naming”; and originally words were “imitative” of the things they named. Onomatopoeic words formed the



nucleus of the vocabulary.

But relatively few words are onomatopoeic. Others were demonstrated to be of “natural” origin by reference to one or more of their constituent sounds. Certain sounds were held to be suggestive, or “imitative”, of particular physical qualities, or activities, being classified as “smooth”, “harsh”, “liquid”, “masculine”, etc. For instance, one might maintain, in the spirit of the “naturalists”, that “/” is a liquid sound, and that therefore the words *liquid*, *flow*, etc., contain a sound which is “naturally” appropriate to their meaning. The modern term for this kind of relationship between the constituent sounds of words and their meaning, in so far as it is asserted to be a feature of language, is *sound-symbolism*.

After taking full account of onomatopoeia and sound-symbolism, the Greek etymologists were still left with very many words to explain. At this point they invoked various principles in terms of which words could be derived from, or related to, one another; and these were codified in time as the traditional principles of etymology. We shall not go into these principles here, except to mention that they fall into two types. First, the meaning of a word might be extended by virtue of some “natural” connexion between the original and the secondary application: cf. the *mouth* of a river, the *neck* of a bottle, etc. (These are examples of *metaphor*; one of the many terms introduced by the Greeks which have passed into traditional grammars and works on style.) Second, the form of a word might be derived from that of another by the addition, deletion, substitution and transposition of sounds (granted some “natural” connexion in the meanings of the two words). It is only by a very free and uncontrolled use of the second set of principles, operating upon the form of a word, that the “naturalists” would maintain their position, claiming to be able to derive all words from a primary set of words of “natural” origin.

Text Two

Direction: The following text is about the phatic function of language. What’s your idea of the phatic function? Do you agree with the author? (M. Yaguello. *Language Through the Looking Glass: Exploring Language and Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998: 12—14)

The phatic function (a word coined by the Polish anthropologist Malinowski) maintains *contact* between speakers and ensures the smooth operation of the channel of communication.

This function already exists prior to articulate language, since the babbling noises made by a newborn baby enable it to establish contact with those around it, while also reassuring its carers about the normality of its speech organs. Indeed, it is well known that without such contact the baby actually stops making the noises: It is of vital importance to speak to babies, so as not to jeopardize their linguistic, emotional, and social development. Given this socializing function of language, play and contact are essential and take precedence over information.

In what is called *mediated* communication—by telephone, radio, etc.—all sorts of fixed expressions are available to check the “circuit”: “Hello, can you hear me?”, or “Receiving you loud and clear”, “Roger”. The speech of a teacher, too, includes numerous interruptions intended to check that attention does not flag and to ensure understanding: “Do you follow?”, “Do you see what I mean?”, “Listen carefully”, “Let me repeat that”, and so on. In the same way, our conversations are riddled with automatic occurrences of “you see” and “you know”.

Listeners for their part use phatic words such as “I see”, “Oh dear!”, “Right!”, “Really?” to convey their appreciation or to signal attention to what the speaker is saying. This kind of feedback is essential in face to face communication and even more so on the telephone.

Finally, in our everyday lives, many exchanges aim only to initiate or maintain social contact. When, for example, a driver picks up a hitch-hiker, one or the other invariably feels obliged to strike up a conversation which by and large is an exchange of banalities, simply because silence in this kind of situation is usually interpreted as hostility. We find the same motivation in most cocktail-party conversations or “small talk”. In Western society the rule is that we talk when in company, for the sake of talking, and it is only in certain situations (our dealings with our nearest and dearest, very formal relationships, or at work) that we can keep quiet if we have nothing to say. During a dinner party, a pregnant pause will cause general embarrassment and a carefully maintained



stock of anecdotes and funny stories is the usual way of keeping up verbal contact without a break. Some people feel genuine panic when contact is broken, because it means that everyone is left to their own devices. And we all know people who endlessly restart the conversation on the doorstep when they are about to leave.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Alice in Wonderland* is that it challenges the phatic function. Alice finds herself in a rather disconcerting world, where the different characters show the highest disregard for *phatic communication*. The rules of conversation as practised in the real world are constantly derided and their stereotyped nature underlined. Polite expressions, sentences or phrases meant to establish or maintain contact, are all taken literally or deliberately misconstrued.

“Oh, I’m not particular as to size,” Alice hastily replied; “Only one doesn’t like changing so often, you know.”

“I *don’t* know,” said the Caterpillar. (71)

“Goodbye, till we meet again!” [Alice] said as cheerfully as she could. “I shouldn’t know you again if we did meet,” Humpty Dumpty replied in a discontented tone. (168)

There is no room in Wonderland, it would appear, for automatic language.