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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Introduction to Language and Linguistics

Course Code: ENG5CJ303 • Module 1 Notes

Module I: Language and Communication

1. The Science of Communication: Definitions & Semiotics

Communication is the universal process through which living organisms transmit information, thoughts, emotions, and intentions through mutually recognized signs, signals, and semiotic codes. While animal communication systems (bee waggle dances, bird songs, primate alarm calls) operate through closed, genetically fixed stimulus-response mechanisms, human language represents a uniquely infinite, recursive, and creative semiotic system.

- **Elements of Communication:** The classical communication model comprises: (1) *Sender / Encoder*, (2) *Message*, (3) *Channel / Medium* (acoustic vibrations, visual text, tactile braille), (4) *Receiver / Decoder*, (5) *Feedback*, and (6) *Noise* (physical acoustic interference, psychological barriers, semantic ambiguities).
- **Verbal versus Non-Verbal Communication:**
  - *Verbal Communication:* Communication structured through human speech sounds or written graphic orthography conforming to grammatical rules.
  - *Non-Verbal Communication:* Transmission of meaning through Kinesics (facial expressions, bodily gestures, posture), Proxemics (spatial distance between speakers), Haptics (touch), Paralanguage (vocal pitch, tempo, volume, intonational sighs), and Chronemics (time orientation).
- **Semiotics (The Science of Signs):** Pioneered by Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure. Peirce categorized signs into three fundamental relationships:
  1. *Icon:* A sign that physically resembles or imitates its referent (e.g., a portrait, a map, a smoking cigarette silhouette on a no-smoking sign).
  2. *Index:* A sign with an inherent physical, causal, or temporal connection to its referent (e.g., smoke indexing fire; dark clouds indexing rain; footprints indexing human presence).
  3. *Symbol:* A sign whose connection to its referent is completely arbitrary, conventional, and learned through cultural immersion (e.g., words in a language, the letters c-a-t, national flags).

2. Defining Human Language: Design Features & Modalities

Linguist Charles Hockett identified sixteen **Design Features of Human Language** that distinguish human verbal communication from all animal communication systems:

- **Displacement:** The capacity of human language to refer to things, events, and abstract ideas that are removed in time and space (the past, the future, hypothetical situations, fictional universes), or things that do not exist (unicorns, utopias). Animals communicate only about the immediate "here and now."
- **Arbitrariness:** There is no natural, physical connection between a linguistic sound-sequence and the object it denotes.
- **Productivity / Open-Endedness:** The infinite capacity of human speakers to generate and comprehend completely novel sentences that have never been uttered before, utilizing a finite set of grammatical rules.
- **Cultural Transmission:** Unlike animal calls which are hardwired genetically, human language is acquired through immersion within a specific human cultural speech community.

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- **Duality of Patterning (Double Articulation):** Language is organized simultaneously on two structural tiers: an inventory of meaningless discrete sounds (phonemes: /b/, /æ/, /t/) which are combined to produce an infinite number of meaningful words and morphemes (/bæt/, /tæb/).
- **Spoken vs. Sign Languages vs. Writing:** Spoken language is primary in human evolution (existing for hundreds of thousands of years across every human culture), whereas written script is a recent technological invention (originating approximately 5,000 years ago in Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics). Natural *Sign Languages* (ASL, BSL, ISL) are complete, fully autonomous grammatical languages with their own complex spatial phonology, morphology, and syntax, completely distinct from spoken language pantomime.

3. Language Classification: Genealogical & Typological

Historical and comparative linguists classify the world's approximately 7,000 languages into distinct families and morphological types:

- **Genealogical (Genetic) Classification:** Groups languages based on historical descent from a shared ancestral mother tongue (Proto-language):
  - *Indo-European Family:* The most widely spoken family globally, spanning Germanic (English, German, Dutch, Swedish), Italic/Romance (Latin, French, Spanish, Italian), Indo-Iranian (Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Persian, Urdu, Punjabi), Celtic, Slavic, Hellenic (Greek), and Baltic.
  - *Dravidian Family:* Indigenous to South Asia, predominantly Southern India: Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, Tulu, and tribal tongues like Toda and Brahui (Pakistan).
  - *Sino-Tibetan:* Spanning Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Burmese, and Tibetan.
  - *Austroasiatic:* Mon-Khmer languages of Southeast Asia and Munda/Khasi languages in India.
  - *Afroasiatic:* Semitic (Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic), Berber, and Cushitic languages.
  - *Niger-Congo (Atlantic-Congo):* Encompassing Swahili, Yoruba, Zulu, and Igbo.
  - *Turkic & Uralic:* Turkic (Turkish, Uzbek, Kazakh); Uralic (Finnish, Hungarian, Estonian).
- **Typological Classification:** Groups languages according to structural, morphological, and word-order features, regardless of historical pedigree:
  - *Morphological Types:* Isolating/Analytic (Chinese, Vietnamese—words consist of single unchanging morphemes), Agglutinative (Turkish, Finnish, Malayalam—morphemes glued together with neat, transparent boundaries), and Fusional/Inflectional (Latin, Sanskrit, Russian—morphemes fuse multiple grammatical categories into single endings).
  - *Word-Order Types:* SVO (Subject-Verb-Object: English, French, Mandarin), SOV (Subject-Object-Verb: Malayalam, Hindi, Japanese, Latin), VSO (Arabic, Biblical Hebrew, Irish).

4. History of English: Old English to Global World Englishes

The English language evolved through dynamic historical ruptures, linguistic colonization, and global expansion:

- **Old English (450–1100 AD):** Triggered by the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain (Angles, Saxons, Jutes). A heavily inflected Germanic language (exemplified in the epic *Beowulf*) enriched by Viking Old Norse loanwords (sky, egg, skin, they).
- **Middle English (1100–1500 AD):** Initiated by the Norman Conquest (1066) under William the Conqueror. Norman French became the language of the aristocracy, court, and law, while English remained the tongue of commoners. Over 10,000 French words flooded the language (beef/cow,

pork/pig, judge, parliament, royal). Grammatical inflections disintegrated, transitioning English toward analytic SVO syntax (Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*).

- **Modern English & The Great Vowel Shift (1500–Present):** The standardization of London dialect through Caxton's printing press (1476), the expansion of Renaissance scholarship, and the phonetic *Great Vowel Shift* (where long vowels raised in tongue position).
- **English in India & Constitutional Status:** Introduced through Macaulay's infamous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Post-independence, the Official Languages Act of 1963 designated Hindi as the Official Language of the Union, with English retained as an **Associate Additional Official Language** indefinitely. Today, General Indian English (GIE) represents a vibrant, institutionalized dialect with distinctive phonology, idioms ("prepone", "cousin-brother"), and syntactic cadences.
- **Braj Kachru's Three Circles of World Englishes:**
  - *The Inner Circle:* Traditional native-speaker nations (UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand)—norm-providing.
  - *The Outer Circle:* Postcolonial nations where English is an institutionalized second language (India, Nigeria, Singapore, Kenya, Philippines)—norm-developing.
  - *The Expanding Circle:* Nations where English is learned as a foreign language for international commerce and diplomacy (China, Japan, Brazil, Germany)—norm-dependent.

Advanced Linguistic Science, Morphosyntax & Sociolinguistic Praxeology (Extension Phase 1)

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1. Foundational Paradigms in Linguistic Theory & Grammar Architecture

Linguists and cognitive scientists navigate essential theoretical cleavages within Module 1:

- **Empiricism vs. Nativism (The Poverty of the Stimulus):** B.F. Skinner's behaviorist model posited that children learn language through external stimulus-response reinforcement and imitation. Noam Chomsky decisively refuted this in 1959, formulating the *Poverty of the Stimulus* argument: children effortlessly acquire infinite, grammatically complex linguistic structures despite exposure to incomplete, flawed spoken input. Chomsky posited the *Innateness Hypothesis*—human infants possess a genetically pre-wired biological Language Acquisition Device (LAD) governed by Universal Grammar (UG).
- **Descriptivism vs. Prescriptivism:** Prescriptive grammar attempts to enforce arbitrary etiquette rules ("Never end a sentence with a preposition", "Do not split infinitives"), often rooted in artificial Latinate models. In contrast, modern scientific linguistics is strictly *descriptive*: its goal is to observe, record, and formulate the actual unconscious structural rules native speakers intuitively employ in real-world communicative ecosystems.
- **Systemic Functionalism vs. Formal Syntax:** While Chomskyan generative grammar treats syntax as an autonomous, abstract mathematical algorithm divorced from social use, M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) argues that language structure is inextricably shaped by social function,

organized around three overarching metafunctions: *Ideational* (construing human experience), *Interpersonal* (enacting social relationships), and *Textual* (creating coherent discourse).

2. Comparative Analytical Matrix: Levels of Linguistic Architecture

A structured comparative assessment delineates performance metrics and structural units in Module 1:

Linguistic Level	Basic Analytical Unit	Primary Analytical Focus	Exemplary Rule / Framework
Phonology	Phoneme / Allophone	Abstract mental sound system, contrastive distribution, minimal pairs.	Three-term consonant labels (Voicing, Place, Manner); IPA transcription.
Morphology	Morpheme (Free/Bound)	Internal word structure, inflectional paradigms, derivational word formation.	Root + Affixes; Compounding, Blending, Clipping, Backformation.
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Semantics & Pragmatics	Lexeme / Speech Act	Literal sense relations (hyponymy, polysemy) and contextual utterance meaning.	Austin's Speech Act Theory (Locution, Illocution, Perlocution); Gricean Maxims.

3. Glossary of Linguistics, Phonetics & Sociolinguistic Variables

Linguistic Term	Subfield	Standard Scientific Definition & Application
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Diglossia	Sociolinguistics	A situation where two distinct varieties of a language co-exist in a speech community: a High (H) variety for formal/written domains and a Low (L) variety for casual speech.
Isogloss	Dialectology	A geographical boundary line mapped across a linguistic territory indicating the geographic limit of a specific linguistic feature (lexical item, vowel pronunciation).
Deep Structure	Generative Syntax	The abstract underlying syntactic representation of a sentence that determines its core semantic interpretation, before transformational rules yield Surface Structure.
Pidgin vs. Creole	Language Contact	A Pidgin is a simplified, non-native contact trade language with no native speakers; a Creole is a full-fledged language that develops when a pidgin is acquired as a first language by children.

4. Formal Linguistic Fieldwork & Analysis Protocol

Professional linguistic research across Module 1 adheres to a structured four-phase scientific method:

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