

## Lecture 1.1

1 Compare the definitions of 'language' (in its general sense) in as many dictionaries as you can find. Do they all focus on the ideational conception of language, or are other functions recognized? For some online definitions, see:

<<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/language>>

<<http://www.yourdictionary.com/language>>

<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/language?&qsrc=>>>

2 Test the claim that body language is extremely limited in its communicative potential. Work out a simple notation for facial expressions and body gestures, and see how large a dictionary you can compile. You can get some ideas about the variables from Ray Birdwhistell's original notation, though this contains more detail than you will need, as it was designed to be used with any language. See:

<<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015010389719>>.

3 If you are in touch with students from different cultural backgrounds, explore the extent to which their kinesic or proxemic behaviour differs from yours. You will find some examples of cultural difference at:

<[http://westsidetoastmasters.com/resources/book\\_of\\_body\\_language/chap5.html](http://westsidetoastmasters.com/resources/book_of_body_language/chap5.html)>

but be aware that there is more local variation in these behaviours than websites tend to recognize.

4 Use a search engine to make a collection of metaphorical uses of the word 'language'. Which aspects of language have motivated the metaphorical use? (For example, on one occasion the phrase 'the language of flowers' might be used in relation to a situation in which one person is expressing gratitude or an apology; on another occasion it might be an emotional response to a beautiful garden.)

5 Develop a sense of the lexical productivity of your language by exploring some of the sites that collect new usage, such as:

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<<http://www.oed.com/help/updates/latest-additions.html>>.

Don't forget to check word-creation competitions, such as:

<[http://www.fun-with-words.com/neologisms\\_competition.html](http://www.fun-with-words.com/neologisms_competition.html)>.

6 Investigate the meanings of the following subjects that form part of the 'speech sciences': anatomy, physiology, neurology, and acoustics. What is the difference between them, and which aspects of language do they help to study? (Include all three modes of transmission in your discussion – speech, writing, sign.)

7 What has to happen to the 'This is a –' construction in order to make it a useful sentence? Experiment with the use of adjectives ('This is an expensive table'; 'This is an awkward table'). Devise contexts where the bare 'This is a table' would be possible.

8 Find other examples where a change of adjective/noun order conveys a stylistic contrast similar to 'the old ruined house' / 'the house, old, ruined'. Look for other cases where changes in word order cause a different stylistic effect. (For example, the position of an adverb in a sentence: '[suddenly] soldiers [suddenly] appeared [suddenly] in the distance'.)

## Lecture 1.2

1 Because pragmatics is a relatively new subject, you will find several definitions of it, as illustrated at:

<http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&biw=1024&bih=557&defl=en&q=define:pragmatics&sa=X&ei=iUj1TMyzGNeAhAfakp3UBQ&ved=0CBkQkAE>.

Go through these definitions and identify the semantic threads that unite them. How far does my approach in terms of 'choice' and 'explanation' account for all the elements in those definitions?

2 Explore a use of language (in speech or writing) from a pragmatic point of view, identifying the intentions behind the choice of language and the effects conveyed. A useful initial strategy is to focus on usages where there are clear alternatives, so that you can contrast the effect of choosing one rather than the other, such as active versus passive, second person pronouns (eg *tu* versus *vous*, or equivalent forms in other languages), contracted versus noncontracted forms of verbs (eg 'isn't' versus 'is not'), or the use of abbreviated versus unabbreviated forms of words (eg 'BBC' versus 'British Broadcasting Corporation'). You will find a relevant grammatical perspective in my *Making Sense of Grammar* (Pearson Longman).

3 Compile a list of as many situations as you can find in which the sentence 'How old are you?' could occur, and evaluate them from a pragmatic point of view. Find other examples of potentially sensitive sentences (eg 'Where have you been?', 'Where are you going?') and explore the range of situations in which they occur.

4 Find other languages that make a distinction similar to the *tu/vous* contrast in French (eg German, Spanish, Italian, Welsh) and explore the situations in which each pronoun would be used. Note that sometimes the formal/informal contrast uses a different person (eg *tu* versus third person *lei* in Italian).

5 Carry out a survey of the terms of address used in your educational setting, such as first names, surnames, nicknames, titles (eg Mr, Mrs), and common nouns (eg Sir,

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Miss). Are there differences between the terms of address used in speech and in writing? Are different terms of address used online?