

Lecture 1.1

1.58 dictionary definition

You will find several senses of the word 'language' in the dictionaries, distinguishing language in general ('the study of language') from individual languages ('the English language, the French language'), as well as several restricted uses (eg 'bad language', 'programming language', 'legal language'). The relevant sense I am talking about here is seen in these two definitions:

- a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meaning (*Longman Dictionary of the English Language*, 1b2)
- words and their use by a particular people as a means of communication [...] a means of communicating information by signs, symbols, etc. (*Penguin Wordmaster Dictionary*, 1, 3)

2.04 ideational

'Ideational' means 'pertaining to the formation of ideas'. It has been used in general intellectual enquiry since the mid-19th century, but it received a new lease of life in linguistics during the 1960s, when British linguist Michael Halliday used it in his approach to linguistics. He distinguished ideational from textual and interpersonal functions of language, describing it as 'the content function of language'. Terms with a similar meaning include 'propositional' and 'referential'.

2.51 semiotics

In using this definition of semiotics ('the systematic study of human communication in all its modes'), I am following an intellectual tradition of studying human communication that was developed in the 1960s by anthropologists, linguists, and others involved in social science, chiefly associated with the name of American linguist Thomas Sebeok, and illustrated in his *Approaches to Semiotics* (1964). The focus on the human being is often reflected by giving the term a specific emphasis:

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'anthroposemiotics'. But semiotics in its most general sense, as 'the study of signs', has a huge area of possible application within literature, philosophy, psychology, and cultural studies, as can be seen in Daniel Chandler's account:

<<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem01.html>>.

4.00 ants

Ants leave chemical traces (pheromones) which identify the path they have travelled. See the account at:

<<http://users.rcn.com/jkimball.ma.ultranet/BiologyPages/P/Pheromones.html>>

4.10 zoosemiotics

Zoosemiotics – often written 'zoösemiotics', to draw attention to the double-vowel pronunciation (as in 'zoology') – is the study of way animals communicate (both within a species and between species) through their signalling behaviour, such as calls, songs, and visual displays. It is a very wide-ranging subject, as can be seen from the articles listed at:

<http://www.biology-online.org/kb/biology_articles/zoology/zoosemiotics.html>.

Birdsong is illustrated at <<http://www.all-birds.com/index.html>> and one species of monkey call at <<http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~mnkylab/media/vervetcalls.html>>.

5.13 kinesics

In the early days of cinematography, 'cinema' often appeared as 'kinema', from a Greek word meaning 'movement'. The 'kine-' element is found in a few other modern coinages, such as 'kinetics' (a branch of dynamics). More on kinesics can be found at <<http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/kinesics.htm>>. The term was first used in the 1950s by American anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell.

5.23 proxemics

The term was invented by anthropologist Edward T Hall in the 1960s. The '-emics' ending was used to suggest a parallel with other areas of linguistics that studied the way formal features express contrasts in meaning, such as 'phonemics' and

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'morphemics'. The aim was to find meaningful contrasts in the way humans interact spatially. More on proxemics can be found at:

<<http://www.cs.unm.edu/~sheppard/proxemics.htm>>.

5.29 nonverbal communication

Look up this term on the Internet and you will be flooded with links to sites advising you on how to improve the way you present yourself nonverbally in interviews, presentations, and a wide range of social and personal relationships. Many sites offer advice about how to achieve sexual success. The front cover of the first paperback edition of social psychologist Michael Argyle's book *Bodily Communication* (1975) shows a charming, fair-haired woman winking at the reader. A perspective on the research field as a whole can be found at:

<<http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/nvcom.htm>>.

The same site also reviews the term 'body language':

<<http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/bodylang.htm>>.

6.31 ear wiggling

This is evidently an uncommon skill, as reported at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/health/HealthRepublsh_1647353.htm>.

6.54 shake me eye

I think I meant to say 'shake my head', but 'wink an eye' got in the way. The result was a blend. There are several other examples of blends in this series of lectures.

7.11 in some parts of the world

Southern European examples include Greece and Italy, as can be seen at:

<<http://learn-italian-software-review.toptenreviews.com/top-ten-essential-italian-hand-gestures-pg2.html>>,

but the same gesture can be found in many parts of Asia, as illustrated by the list at:

<http://www.odu.edu/ao/oip/elc/S_Imai.pdf>.

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7.44 dance

I am thinking of developed systems such as are found in India. One such system is illustrated at <http://www.ehow.com/video_2382623_basic-bharatanatyam-dance-hand-gestures.html>.

7.55 touch

Communication through touch is often referred to as 'haptic' behaviour (from a Greek word meaning 'contact'). A wide range of meanings can be communicated, as illustrated by the possibilities within hand-shaking at:

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A20363267>>.

8.38 the term 'language'

Other metaphorical uses of 'language', apart from those already mentioned, include 'cinematic language' (styles of film-making), 'the language of flowers' (flower-arranging), 'the language of landscape' (interpreting natural features), 'the language of light and shade' (in art), 'the language of food' (on culinary habits), and 'the language of love' (for love-making techniques). A similar metaphorical use of linguistic terminology (in relation to 'syntax') is mentioned in Lecture 2.2.

9.49 productivity

The term 'productive' was originally used in linguistics as a way of describing the ability of particular prefixes or suffixes to create new words. An ending such as '-ness' is highly productive, because it can be used to make an indefinite number of new words. An ending such as '-ship' is less productive. We can also make new words in other ways, such as by blending (eg 'brunch') and abbreviation (eg 'lol'). Some grammatical processes are productive, too, as when we form the past tense of English verbs by adding '-ed' ('walk' > 'walked').

10.05 how many words

The myth that the English language passed a million words in mid-2009 is debunked on my blog at <<http://david-crystal.blogspot.com/2009/04/on-biggest-load-of-rubbish.html>>. The point is referred to again in Lecture 2.1 at 5.50.

10.12 inventing new words

There are many sites and books which have explored the possibilities of word creation, especially in relation to language play (see Lecture 5.2). Many take a word and change a letter to make a new and humorous coinage, or give a word a new definition (or a place name, as in Douglas Adams and John Lloyd's *The Meaning of Liff*). An example using foreign phrases is to be found on my blog at <http://david-crystal.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html>. But normal word-creation takes place routinely, as can be observed from the listings of new words on dictionary sites such as the OED's 'latest additions' page:

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

10.36 you probably haven't heard me talk about

I meant: 'you probably haven't heard anyone talk about'.

10.54 length of a sentence

There are several examples in literature of sentences of hundreds or thousands of words in length, as this source illustrates: <<http://www.prlog.org/10039127-longest-sentence-in-english-literature-language.html>>. But even that sentence could be made longer. There is no theoretical limit to the length of a sentence.

11.47 dictionaries of semiotic behaviour

An example is 'The Nonverbal Dictionary' by David B Givens at <<http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/6101.html>>. Note that the small numbers I mention refer to the set of expressions that can be readily discriminated and replicated in a particular culture. People can easily identify and copy each other's winking, smiling, eyebrow raising, and so on. There can't be a precise figure: more subtle gradations of facial expression also exist, such as different degrees of eyebrow raising or eye narrowing, and these would add to the inventory.

11.56 even in Indian dance

The reference to 'a few hundred' would include hand gestures and body movements, as well as facial expressions.

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12.02 there isn't a grammar there

It is of course possible in a face-to-face conversation to use a couple of gestures or facial expressions in a sequence – for example, a negative reaction might use a shake of the head followed by a thumbs-down gesture. However, it would be very odd if a conversation were to continue like this for much longer. The limits of kinesic behaviour can be easily judged if we observe people who can see but not hear each other trying to communicate visually – such as on two sides of a noisy street. There is a serious limit to the amount of information that can be precisely and unambiguously conveyed.

12.14 sign language of the deaf

This is discussed briefly at the beginning of Lecture 3.1.

12.25 duality of structure

This goes by various names, in the linguistics literature, such as 'double articulation' or 'duality of patterning'. The basic principle is that meaningful units (words, phrases, sentences...) can be broken down into meaningless units (sounds or letters). There are some uses of sound which are vaguely symbolic in character, and suggest meanings – such as 'wobble', which somehow seems appropriate to the action, or the sounds in the word 'splash'. These are examples of sound symbolism. But most of these effects are due to the sounds being used in sequence. When we listen to individual sounds (such as [w] or [s]), the semantic effects disappear.

13.30 some people do use the term in that way

You will find university departments or courses called 'speech and hearing science', 'speech and hearing sciences', 'speech science', and 'speech sciences'. I don't know of any that use the term 'listening', presumably because listening is viewed as falling within hearing. (Listening is perhaps best described as 'hearing with attention'.) The actual sciences that are treated under these headings are anatomy, physiology, and neurology, as well as phonetics, linguistics, and parts of psychology.

13.36 focuses ... on auditory-vocal communication

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There are three reasons for this focus. All languages are spoken before they are written (and many have never been written down). Children learn to speak before they learn to write (and many never become literate). And speaking is a more natural mode of interpersonal communication than writing. But this focus is not meant to play down the importance of written language and sign language as mediums in their own right. Linguistics includes all of these modes of transmission within its remit, as is discussed further in Lecture 3.

13.54 a little stage

Another blend: I meant to say 'a little way', but 'a stage' got in the way.

13.58 structure and use

The importance of distinguishing and interrelating these two dimensions is a basic theme in several accounts of language study. In my own writing, for example, you will see it in the opening chapter of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press).

14.48 a course-book

There were many such books. Page 1 of Chapter 1 of *Success with English*, a popular 1960s English course for foreign learners, begins: 'This is a man'. We proceed from there to 'This is Martin. Martin is a man'. Then to such sentences as 'That's a horse and this is a horse'. In *English This Way*, an American course also of the 1960s, the opening lesson has a string of sentences of the type 'What's that? It's a table'. These are certainly important structures to learn, but more attention needs to be paid to finding illustrative contexts in which such sentences would have a more natural use.

15.53 exc- lovely

I do not finish my articulation of the word 'excellent'.

16.55 the things are sort of differently

A blend of 'sort of different' and 'work differently'.

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18.27 if you want a definition

Definitions of pragmatics are many and various in the linguistics literature, partly because it is such a recent development within the subject (dating only from the 1980s). My definition focuses on the notions of choice and explanation. Pragmatics, in my view, is an attempt to explain why someone chooses to use language in a particular way and what effect that choice has on the addressee. Other definitions may be more general in character, such as: 'the study of the way language is used in social situations', 'the study of meaning in context', or 'the study of the relationship between language and its users'. There is also an extremely general definition of pragmatics within semiotics: 'the relation between signs and their users'. To define it broadly as 'the study of language in use' I find is too general, as this doesn't allow us to distinguish between what I am here calling pragmatics and the other dimensions of language use, such as those studied by sociolinguistics. But be prepared to encounter different points of view in the characterization of this subject. The range of viewpoints can be seen at:

<http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&biw=1218&bih=690&defl=en&q=define:pragmatics&sa=X&ei=TjTVTKSAGcXe4Aak7tXcBw&ved=0CBgQkAE>

19.14 alliteration

Words beginning with the same sound. An example is 'Thee, serpent, subtlest beast in all the field' (John Milton). If that had turned up in my exam, I would have to have underlined 'serpent' and 'subtlest' to get my 100%. What is missing is an explanation of why Milton decided to use alliteration here. There is a fairly obvious phonetic explanation in this example: the repeated [s] sounds capture the hissing of the serpent.

19.19 passive construction

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The distinction between active and passive voice is given later (24.44). I am talking about such differences as (in a piece of science writing) 'The mixture was poured into a beaker' and 'I poured the mixture into a beaker'. Science privileges an impersonal manner of exposition, where it is not important to say 'who did it', and this makes the use of an active voice less likely.

20.42 How old are you?

Several websites illustrate the routine use of this question in teaching, such as:

<<http://esl.about.com/od/beginnerpronunciation/a/basicquestions.htm>>,

where it is one of '50 Basic English Questions'. Several sites draw attention to the pragmatic dangers inherent in this question, such as in job recruitment interviews, where age discrimination is an issue:

<<http://bizcovering.com/employment/questions-you-cannot-ask-at-job-recruitment-interviews>>.

It's also apparently not a question you should ask on a first date:

<<http://www.howtodothings.com/family-and-relationships/a1733-how-to-ask-questions-on-a-first-date.html>>.

23.11 'tu' and 'vous'

An account of the various uses of 'tu' and 'vous', paying special attention to the pragmatics, can be seen at:

<http://www.french-linguistics.co.uk/grammar/tu_and_vous.shtml>

23.55 *évidemment*

My use of a French example seems to have triggered a French expression. The word means 'of course, obviously'.

24.07 *tutoyer*

The word means 'address someone with *tu*-forms' – that is, speak in a familiar way. The corresponding term is '*vousvoyer*'.

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25.21 the agent

'Agent' here is sometimes called a 'by-agent', to make it clear that we are talking about this particular role in a passive sentence – one introduced by the word 'by'. The problem is that 'agent' by itself simply means the 'doer' of the action expressed by the verb – a definition that could also apply to the subject of an active sentence.

25.50 go on a passive hunt

The allusion, of course, is to Michael Rosen's 'We're going on a bear hunt':

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytc0U2WAz4s>>. With luck, you'll catch some really big ones.

27.34 tone of voice

Tone of voice is discussed further in Lecture 3.1.

28.39 'Good morning, Mr Jones'

Each usage could allow several interpretations, depending on our understanding of the broader context and on the tone of voice in which the greeting is said. But 'Mr Jones' would usually imply that the speaker is subordinate to his addressee, whereas 'Jones' suggests he is the man's superior. If he used the familiar 'J J', he would probably be a long-standing colleague. 'John Jones' usually suggests a jocular criticism: we can imagine Jones's wife telling him off for some trivial misdemeanour ('Now you listen to me, John Jones...'). 'Jonesey' is an intimate term, likely to be used only by workmates at the same level. And 'nobber' is really intimate – a nickname that only certain people would be expected to use.

Formal address styles relating to different social positions are illustrated at:

<<http://www.debretts.com/forms-of-address.aspx>>.

American usage is also illustrated at:

<<http://www.cftech.com/BrainBank/OTHERREFERENCE/FORMSOFADDRESS/SpkWritFrmsAddr.html>>.