

Discuss the Significant Characteristics of Language

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What is language? Discuss the significant properties or characteristics of language.

Language is an inseparable part of human society. Human civilisation has been possible through language. Humanity only emerged from the Stone Age through language and has significantly developed science, art, and technology. Language is a means of communication, meaning it is arbitrary and a system of systems. We know that Speech is primary while writing is secondary.

Definition of Language: Language is the method of human communication, either spoken or written, using words in a structured or conventional way.

According to Aristotle, "Language stands for speech that human produce for exchanging their experience resulting in ideas and emotion."

According to Noam Chomsky, "A language is a set of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements."

Characteristics of Language: According to the definition of language from the perspective of different linguists, language possesses the following characteristics, which are limited here.

Language is Arbitrary: Language is arbitrary in that there is no inherent relation between the words of a language and their meanings or the ideas conveyed by them. There is no reason why a female adult is called a woman in English, aurat in Urdu, Zen in Persian and Feminine in French. The word choice to mean a particular thing or idea is purely arbitrary, but once a word is selected for a specific reference, it stays as such. Had language not been arbitrary, there would have been only one language in the world.

Language is Social: Language is a set of conventional communicative signals used by humans for communication in a community. In this sense, language is a possession of a social group, comprising an indispensable set of rules that permits its members to relate to each other, interact with each other, and Co-operate with each other; it is a social institution. Language exists in society; it is a means of nourishing and developing culture and establishing human relations.

Language is Symbolic: Language consists of various sound symbols and their graphological counterparts employed to denote some objects, occurrences or meanings. These symbols are arbitrarily chosen and conventionally accepted and employed.

Language is Systematic: Although symbolic, symbols are arranged in a particular system. All languages have their system of arrangements. For example, we have morphological and syntactic systems within the grammatical system, and within these two subsystems, we have systems such as plural, mood, aspect, tense, etc.

Language is Vocal: Language is primarily made up of vocal sounds only produced by a physiological articulatory mechanism in the human body. In the beginning, they appeared to be vocal sounds only. Writing, which came much later, is an intelligent attempt to represent vocal sounds. Writing is only the graphic representation of the sounds of the language. So, the linguists say that speech is primary.

Language is Non-instinctive and Conventional: No language was created in a day by a group of humans. Language is the outcome of evolution and convention. Each generation transmits this convention on to the next. Like all human institutions, languages change, die, grow, and expand. Every language, therefore, is a convention in a community. It is non-instinctive because human beings acquire it. Nobody gets a language in heritage; he acquires it because he has an innate ability.

Language is Productive and Creative: Language is creative and productive. The structural elements of human language can be combined to produce new utterances, and language changes according to society's needs.

Others: Language has other characteristics, such as duality, which refers to the two systems of sound and meaning. Displacement, which means the ability to talk across time and space, is also a language trait. Universality, competence and performance, and cultural transmutation are the noticeable features of language.

From the above discussion, it is clear that language features relate to changes in culture and civilisation. With time, new traits will be produced for language.