

Structural, Functional, and Interactional Views of Language

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Discuss structural, functional, and interactional views of language.

Language is a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary. The study of language involves different perspectives. The three main views are the structural, functional, and interactional approaches. Each approach helps us understand how language works and how it fulfils its roles in society.

The Structural View of Language: The structural view sees language as a system of organized structures. This approach focuses on the rules governing how sounds, words, and sentences are formed. Language is understood as a set of grammatical and phonological patterns. In this view:

- **Language as a Structure:** Language is seen as a system made up of phonology (sound systems), morphology (word formation), syntax (sentence structure), and semantics (meaning).
- **Focus on Grammar:** The main focus is learning rules, structures, and patterns. They are essential for forming correct sentences.
- **Importance of Accuracy:** The structural view emphasizes accuracy, as mastering the structures of a language is seen as the key to effective communication.

The structural view is linked to traditional methods like the Grammar Translation Method. It stresses memorization and practice of grammatical rules.

The Functional View of Language: The functional view of language focuses on how language is used to fulfill communicative purposes. Unlike the structural view, the functional view centres on the social functions of language. In this view:

- **Language as a Tool for Communication:** Language is primarily a tool for expressing needs. This means making requests, giving information, and fulfilling other social purposes.
- **Focus on Meaning and Use:** The functional view prioritizes what language does rather than how it is structured. It emphasizes understanding the functions behind language, like requesting, apologizing, or persuading.

- **Context and Pragmatics:** Context plays a key role, as the same sentence can have different meanings depending on the situation, tone, and audience.

This approach aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT). It emphasizes real-life communication and fluency.

The Interactional View of Language: The interactional view sees language as a means of building and maintaining social relationships. This perspective focuses on the interactive and interpersonal aspects of communication. In this view:

- **Language as Social Interaction:** Language is viewed as a way of creating and maintaining social bonds. It's about exchanging information, building connections, and participating in social life.
- **Emphasis on Conversation:** The interactional view highlights the dynamics of conversation, such as turn-taking, politeness strategies, and the roles people play in communication.
- **Cultural and Social Norms:** Understanding the interactional rules of a language involves learning about the cultural and social norms that guide communication within a particular community.

The interactional approach is often used in teaching practices that focus on dialogue, role-playing, and other activities that simulate real-life interactions.

Comparing the Views: These three views are not mutually exclusive but provide complementary insights. While the structural view emphasizes the “what” of language, focusing on grammar and form, the functional view focuses on the “why,” emphasizing the purpose behind language use. The interactional view adds the “how” of language, focusing on how language is used in social settings.

Practical Implications: Understanding these views has practical applications in both language learning and teaching:

- **Structural Approach:** This approach is helpful for beginners who need to learn the basics of grammar and sentence structure.
- **Functional Approach:** This approach benefits learners who need to use the language in specific situations, like business or travel.
- **Interactional Approach:** This approach is ideal for learners focusing on conversational skills, especially in cultural contexts.

In summary, each view has its strengths and limitations. The choice of approach depends on the learners' needs and goals. By combining these views, learners gain a more holistic understanding of language.

LxNotes