

Day 2: Introduction

Ling 200: Introduction to Linguistic Thought

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1 *Review*

2 *What is language?*

- 'Big 5' facts
- Design Features
- Modality

Competence and Performance



- What are linguistic competence and linguistic performance?
- How do linguists study linguistic competence?
- By observing linguistic performance.

Core subfields

Interdisciplinary subfields

Interdisciplinary subfields of linguistics

- Sociolinguistics
- Historical linguistics
- Computational linguistics
- Psycholinguistics / Neurolinguistics
- Language and culture

What is language?

Some general properties

'Big 5' facts about language

- All languages have a grammar
 - complex and “layered”, but systematic at every level
 - rules to create sentences/words we've never heard before
- All grammars are equal
 - not “the same”, but equally complex and functional
 - there are no “primitive” human languages
- Grammars are alike in basic ways
 - the same concepts and units; universal patterns
- Grammars change over time
 - all levels of grammar are subject to change
 - not always simplification / added complexity
- Grammatical knowledge is subconscious
 - we recognise im/possible sounds, words, sentences, etc
 - we can't always explain why

What is language?

Design Features

- Charles Hockett (1960)
- Characterize language, distinguish it from other communication systems
- If a system lacks even one feature, it is communication, not language

Design Features

- Discreteness
- Arbitrariness
- Cultural transmission
- Displacement
- Interchangeability
- Productivity

Design Features

Discreteness

Discreteness

Definition (Discreteness)

Larger, complex messages can be broken down into smaller, discrete parts

Example (Discreteness)

'pat' → [p], [a], [t] ⇒ 'tap', 'apt'

Design Features

Arbitrariness

Arbitrariness

Definition (Arbitrariness)

There is no (necessary) connection between the *form* of signal and its *meaning*

Example (Arbitrariness)



'whale' is small word for big animal,
'microorganism' is just the reverse

Example (Arbitrariness: counterexample)

iconicity; e.g., onomatopoeia

Design Features

Cultural Transmission

Cultural Transmission

Definition (Cultural Transmission)

At least some aspect of the communication system is learned from other users

Example (Cultural Transmission)

Any child growing up in a French-speaking environment will learn French

Design Features

Displacement

Displacement

Definition (Displacement)

Ability to talk about things not present in space or time

Example (Displacement)



A long time ago in a galaxy far,
far away....

Design Features

Interchangeability

Interchangeability

Definition (Interchangeability)

A user can both receive and broadcast the same signal

Example (Interchangeability)

Any conversation (where people trade roles speaking and listening)

Design Features

Productivity

Productivity

Definition (Productivity)

Speakers can create infinite number of novel utterances that others can understand

Example (Productivity)

“Little purple gnomes living in my sock drawer said, ‘Elvis lives’.”

Modality

Signed languages

- Modality
 - auditory-vocal = aural-oral = spoken languages
 - visual-gestural = signed languages
- Signed languages
 - Not codes for spoken languages
 - Not purely iconic
 - Structurally complex at all levels
 - Meet all design features of language

Modality

Written language

- Written language = secondary to spoken language
 - Historical development
 - Everyone speaks a language; not all languages are written
 - Learning to speak is automatic; learning to write is not
 - More of the brain is used when writing than speaking
 - Writing can be edited