



CLICK & JOIN



Pedagogy of Teaching English – Part 1

Definitions, Characteristics & Functions of Language

Oxford English Dictionary defines language as “Words and the methods of combining them for the expression of thoughts”

According to Edward Sapir (1921), “Language is a purely human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.”

According to Bolinger, “Language is species specific.”

According to H.A. Gleason, “Language is one of the most important and characteristic forms of human behavior.”

According to B. Bloch, (1942), “A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates”

According to Block and Tragers: “Language is a set of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group communicates.”

According to Otto Jespersen: “Language is a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to human thoughts and feelings specially to impart them to others.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE

Language is Learnt

Language is not a born activity as crying and walking. It is not an automatic process. It has to be learnt. Any learner learns the language by imitation and practice

Language is an acquired Behaviour

Language is acquired behavior. If a baby or man is shifted to another community or cultural group, he will acquire the language spoken by that cultural community. For

example; if an Indian family is settled in United States, the children of the family will acquire the English language with an American accent

Language is a **System**

Language is a system like a human body, just as body functions through different organs such as brain, heart, lungs. In the same way, language functions through sounds, words and structures

Language is **Vocal**

The language is primarily observed speech. Speech is a fundamental thing in language learning, reading and writing are secondary. Through speech and modulation of speech, we get a clear picture of English inflexion

Language is **Ever-changing**

No language on earth is static. Every language is undergoing changes in its grammar, vocabulary, structure and phonology with the course of time.

Language is **for Communication**

The main purpose of language is communication. Since it is so, a person's speech must be intelligible to others. For this, he must acquire the right pronunciation and intonation

Language is **Arbitrary**

Language is arbitrary. There is no relationship between the words of a language and its meaning. The relationship between word and meaning is arbitrary

Language is **Based on Cultural Experiences**

Every language is the product of a particular society and culture. 'Good morning', 'Thank you', 'Sorry' and such kinds of words reveal the culture of English people.

Language is **Made of Habits**

A language is learnt by use and not by rules. Learning a language is a process of habit formation

Language is **Unique**

Each language is unique. No two languages are alike. They cannot have the same set of patterns of structures, sounds, grammatical rules or words. The sounds, structures, vocabularies of every language have their own specialty.

FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

M. A. K. Halliday (1975) explained seven basic functions of language in his book, 'Exploration in the functions of language'.

Instrumental Function

The word 'instrumental' means serving as an instrument or means. The instrumental function refers to the use of language as an instrument to make the recipient do something.

Regulatory Function

'To regulate' means to control or to direct by a rule, method or principle. The regulatory function of language refers to the use of language to regulate the behaviour of others

Interaction Function

To interact' means to 'to act one upon other or to talk with each other.' The interactional function of language refers to the use of language in the interaction between 'self and others'

Personal Function

The word 'personal' means private or of a particular person. The personal function of language refers to the use of language to express personal feelings and meanings. It aims at a direct expression of the speaker's attitude towards what he is speaking about

Heuristic Function

The term 'heuristic' is a theory in education based on the idea that a learner should discover things himself. The heuristic function of language refers to language as a means of investigating reality, a way of learning about things that are using language to learn and to discover. It is the use of language for inquiry or questioning

Imaginative Function

'To imagine' means to form a picture of something in the mind, think of the probability of things. The imaginative function of language refers to language used to create a world of the imagination

Representational Function

'To represent' means to depict, to show, to describe or to present in words. The representational function of language refers to language used to communicate information

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