

Characteristics of Language

Language is that human expression which is uttered out by speech organs. It has following characteristics —

(I) Language is verbal, vocal: Language is sound :-

Language is an organization of sounds, of vocal symbols — the sounds produced from the mouth with the help of various organs of speech to convey some meaningful message. It also means that speech is primary to writing.

There are several languages in the world which have no writing systems, yet they are languages because they are spoken. Music and singing also employ vocal sounds, but they are not language. Language is a systematic verbal symbolism; it makes use of verbal elements such as sound, words and phrases, which are arranged in certain ways to make sentences. Language is vocal in as much as it is made up of sounds which can be produced by the organs of speech.

(II) Language is a means of communication —

Language is the most powerful, convenient and permanent means and form of communication. Non-linguistic symbols such as expressive gestures, signals of various kinds, traffic lights, road signs and many more such things as well as shorthand, Morse and other codes, Braille alphabets etc are also means of communication, yet they are not so flexible, comprehensive, perfect and extensive as language is. Language is the best means of self-expression. It is through language that humans express their thoughts, desires, emotions and feelings; it is through it that they store knowledge, transmit messages, knowledge and experience from one person to another, from one generation to another. It is through it that humans interact.

• Language is a social phenomenon :-

Language is a set of conventional communicative signals used by humans for communication in a community. Language in this sense is a possession of a social group, comprising an indispensable set of rules which permit its members to relate to each other, to interact with each other, to co-operate with each other: it is a social institution.

• Language is non-instinctive, conventional -

No language was created in a day out of mutually agreed on formula 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 language also change and die; grow and expand. Every language then is a convention in a community. It is non-instinctive because it is acquired by human beings. No body gets a language in heritage; he acquires it, and everybody has been provided with an innate ability to acquire language.

• Language is arbitrary —

By the arbitrariness of language we mean that there is no inherent or logical relation or similarity between any given feature of language and its meaning. There is no reason why the four-legged domestic animals should be called dog in English, kutta in Hindi, kukkur in Sanskrit, kukka in Telgu, kukur in Bengali, Chien in French, hund in German etc. That those particular words rather than any other are used in these different languages, is merely an accident of linguistic history.

• Language is symbol :-

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols. For concepts, things, ideas, objects etc we have sound and words as symbols.

• Language is systematic :-

Every language is a system of systems. All languages have phonological and grammatical systems, and within a system there are several sub-systems. For example, within the grammatical system we have morphological and syntactic systems, and within these two sub-systems we have several other systems such as those of plural, of mood, of aspect, of tense etc.

• Language is human and structurally complex —

No species other than humans has been endowed with language. Animals can not acquire human language because of its complex structure and their physical inadequacies. Animals do not have the type of brain which the human beings possess and their articulatory organs are also very much different from those of human beings.