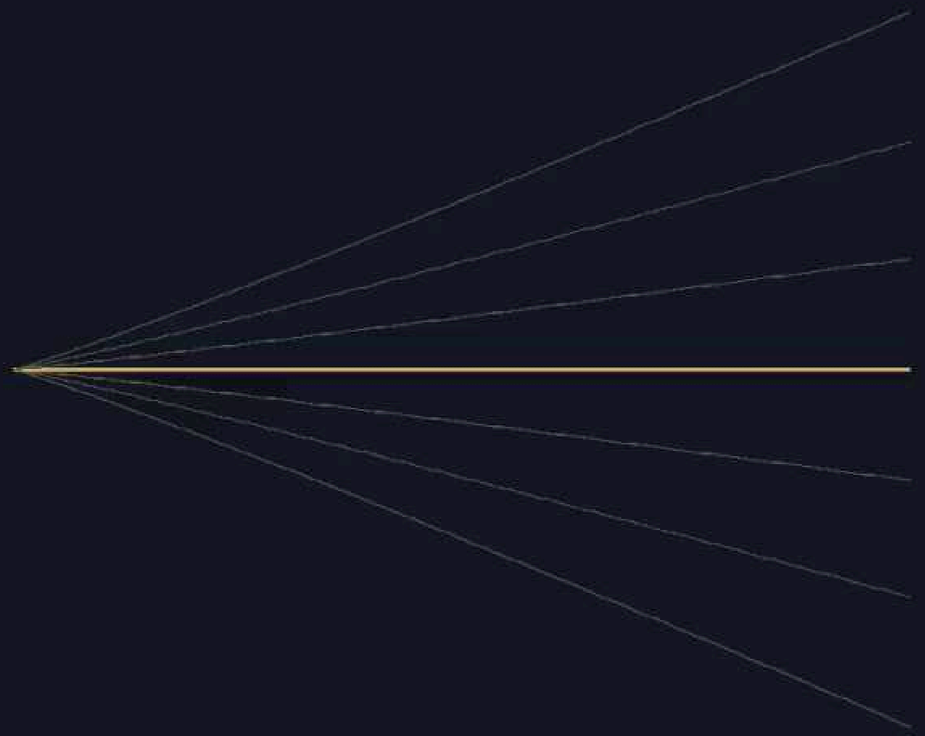
ANDERSON ACADEMY

LING 101 B · Introduction to Linguistics (Brief course)

Lecture 1 · about 6 min

What Is Language?



A library of university-level courses

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Hockett's design features

- Arbitrariness
- Productivity
- Displacement
- Duality of patterning
- Cultural transmission

¶ 1.1

The American linguist Charles Hockett listed design features that together distinguish human language.

Hockett's design features

- Arbitrariness
- Productivity
- Displacement
- Duality of patterning
- Cultural transmission

¶ 1.1

Among them are arbitrariness, productivity, displacement, duality of patterning, and cultural transmission.

Saussure's sign

Signifier

- Signifier
- The sound pattern
- The word dog

Signified

- Signified
- The concept
- The idea of a dog

¶ 1.2

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure described the linguistic sign as a pairing of a signifier, the sound,

Limits of arbitrariness

- Onomatopoeia: buzz, splash
- Differs by language: woof, meong
- Sound symbolism: teeny
- A small part of vocabulary

¶ 1.3

Sound symbolism also exists: across many languages, words with the vowel ee, as in teeny,

Productivity

A finite vocabulary

▼

A finite set of rules

▼

Combined in new ways

▼

An infinite number of sentences

¶ 1.4

A finite set of words and rules generates an infinite number of sentences.

Two more features

Displacement

- Displacement
- Talk about absent things
- Past, future, fiction

Duality

- Duality
- Meaningless sounds form words
- Words form sentences

¶ 1.5

Duality of patterning means that meaningless units, sounds, combine into meaningful units, words, which combine into sentences.

Animal communication

- Bees: the waggle dance
- Vervet monkeys: alarm calls
- Birds: structured song
- None has all the design features

¶ 1.6

Vervet monkeys have distinct alarm calls for leopards, eagles, and snakes, but cannot combine them into new messages.

Apes and language

- **1960s** — Washoe learns signs
- **1970s** — Koko and Nim Chimpsky
- **1979** — Terrace's critique
- **1980s onward** — Kanzi and keyboard symbols

¶ 1.7

But critics such as Herbert Terrace, who studied the chimpanzee Nim Chimpsky,

Two meanings of grammar

Linguistic

- Linguist's grammar
- Unconscious knowledge
- Known by every speaker

School

- School grammar
- Rules of correct style
- Often prescriptive

¶ 1.8

Every native speaker of English knows that the big red ball sounds right and the red big ball sounds odd,

Competence and performance

Competence

- Competence
- Knowledge of the language
- Ideal and unconscious

Performance

- Performance
- Actual speech
- Slips and pauses

¶ 1.9

Performance contains slips, false starts, and hesitations caused by memory limits and distraction.

Evidence in linguistics

- Grammaticality judgements
- Recordings of speech
- Experiments
- Corpora of written and spoken text

¶ 1.10

These grammaticality judgements are a key source of evidence.

Approaches to universals

Chomsky

- Chomsky
- An innate universal grammar
- From deep analysis of a few languages

Greenberg

- Greenberg
- Statistical universals
- From comparing many languages

¶ 1.11

For example, if a language puts its verbs before objects, it usually has prepositions;

The universals debate

- Nativists: a language instinct
- Critics: deep diversity
- Universals from general cognition?
- An open question

¶ 1.12

and that universals may reflect shared human cognition and communication needs rather than a special language organ.

Sign languages

- Full natural languages
- Their own grammars
- Not universal: ASL differs from BSL
- Learned like spoken languages

¶ 1.13

American and British Sign Language are not mutually intelligible.

Nicaraguan Sign Language

- **Late 1970s** — Deaf schools open
- **First cohort** — a simple system
- **Younger children add grammar**
- **A new language is born**

¶ 1.14

but younger children who learned from them made it more complex and regular, adding grammar.

Summary of lecture one

- Design features
- Animals and apes
- Grammar as unconscious knowledge
- Universals and sign languages

¶ 1.15

Linguists debate how universal language is, and sign languages show that language is not tied to speech. Next we study sounds.