Lecture No. 3  **What is language?**

**Animals and human language**  
**Features and characteristics**

Linguistics is defined as the systematic study of language – a discipline which describes language in all its aspects and formulates theories as to how it works.

Language is the specialized sound signaling system which seems to be genetically programmed to develop in humans. Humans can, of course, communicate in numerous other ways, they can work, wave, smile, tap someone on the shoulder, and so on.

It is clear that humans can transfer language to various other media: written symbols, Braille, sign language, and so on. Sign language is particular has interesting characteristics which are not to be participated in spoken word. However, language based on sound is more widespread and more basic, so it is given more importance in this analysis.

Language is apart of culture, it is apart of human behavior. It is an acquired habit of systematic vocal activity representing meanings coming from human experience.

**Some features of difference between human language and animal communication.**

**Use of sound signals**

When animals communicate with on another, they may do so by a variety of means. Grabs, for example, communicate by waving their claws at one another. But such method are not as widespread as the use of sounds, which are employed by humans, birds, monkeys, and many other species. So our use of sound is no way unique. Sound signals have several advantages. They can be used in the dark, and at some distance to allow several messages to be sent.
By regarding language basically as sound, the linguist can take the advantage of the fact that all human beings produce speech sounds with essentially the same equipment.

Even foreign language may sound strange or difficult to use, all of them can be described by accounting the movement of the articulatory organs that produce them.

**Arbitrariness**

An animal communication, their a strong recognizable link between the actual signal and the message an animal wishes to convey. An animal who wishes to warn off an opponent may simulate an attacking attitude.

In human language there is no link between the signal and the message. The symbols used are arbitrary. There is no connection, for example, between the word elephant and the animal it symbolizes. Onomatopoeic words such as quack-quack are exceptions and they are relatively few.

**The need for learning**

Animal communicate with each other without learning. Their systems of communication are genetically inbuilt. This is quite different from the long learning process needed to acquire human language, which is culturally transmitted, and totally conditioned by the environment, and there is almost some type of innate predisposition towards language in a newborn child. But this latent potentiality can be activated only by long exposure to language which require careful learning.

**Duality**

In animal communication vocal signals have a stock of sounds which vary according to species. Cow, for example, has ten, a chicken has around twenty, and a fox over thirty.
Human language works rather differently. Each language has a stock of sound units or phonemes, the average number is between 30 to 40. But each phoneme is normally meaningless in isolation. It becomes meaningful only when it is combined with other phonemes. That is, the sounds such as f, g, d, o mean nothing separately. The normally take on meaning only when they combined together in various ways, as in fog, dog, god.

This organization of language into layers— a layer sounds which combine into a second layer of larger unit— is known as **duality** or **double articulation**. Communication system with duality is considerably more flexible than one without it, because a far greater number of messages can be sent.

### Displacement

Most animals can communicate about things in the immediate environment only. A bird utters its danger cry only when danger is present. It cannot give information about a peril which is removed in time and place.

Human language can communicate about things that are absent as easily as about things that are present. This apparently rare phenomenon, known as displacement, does occasionally appear in the animal world, but this ability is limited for animal communication.

Human language can cope with any subject whatever, and it does not matter how far away the topic of conversation is in time and place.

### Creativity(Productivity)

Most animal have very limited number of messages they can send or receive. This restriction is not found in human language which is creative or productive. Human can produce novel utterances wherever they want to. A person can utter a sentence which has never been said before, in most unlikely circumstances, and still be understood.
Patterning

Human language is not a haphazard heap of individual items. Humans do not juxtapose sounds and words in a random way. Instead, they ring the changes on a few defined patterns. In English, for example, the sounds a.b, s.t. have only four possible ways to arrange bats, tabs, stab, or bast, but not sbt, abts, stab because the 'rules' subconsciously followed by people who know English do not allow these combinations for a new word.

Similarly, consider the words, burglar, loudly, sneezed, the, only three combination are possible:

The burglar sneezed loudly.
Loudly sneezed the burglar
The burglar loudly sneezed. (perhaps)

English places firm restrictions on which item can occur together, and the order in which they come. Every item in language has its own characteristic place in the total pattern.

Language can be regarded as an intricate network of interlinked elements in which every item is held in its place and given its identity by all the other items.