

# The function for language essay



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From our days as a growing infant where every activity is some sort of learning experience, the brain registers/stores information often as it is experienced for the first time resulting in the child being consciously aware that a hot iron equates to 'hot; hurts!' and milk means 'good, yummy!' But much is unknown about the linguistic knowledge we display primitively before mastering with no awareness complex rules are/have been learnt/put into use (Chomsky et al theorise an internal blueprint that develops as we biologically develop).

Shortly after we can read, write, listen and speak grammatical sentences using relative clauses, noun phrases, verbs and adverbs without even knowing what they are but instinctively knowing if their usage is correct or not. All seems so simple being language is a daily requirement and only when a foreign language is taught (or visa versa) we become aware of languages complexities. To know a language is more than to recite words with correct pronunciation but more a matter of word association, can you match a word with the concept behind it (its meaning). For example, if a song is performed in English (a trend in Europe) the band know the words and how to pronounce them but may have no idea what they have just said, although we will. A foreigner might associate the word 'car' with the concept of a 'dog' meaning when they point at an animal with four legs, a tail and a mouth that barks and say 'car', they will know what they are expressing, but we won't.

In both instances the communication is one-way, to know a language is not only for you to understand but to be understood, 'two-way traffic'. For this to happen the lexicon (entire vocabulary) has to link each word with its '

semantic property', meaning in the second example when the speaker says 'car' they should know that word's 'semantic features' are 'wheels, automobile, machine' and should know not to point to a 'dog' whose 'semantic features' are 'four legs, tail, animal, non human'. Another basic example is 'father', semantic features are as follows 'parent, male, human'. Even when semantics becomes more complex English natives should have no trouble comprehending meaning, this is usually where a foreigner's knowledge will falter (and visa versa overseas). When you start to get into the realm of : 'homographs' (same spelling/different meaning) 'homonyms' (same pronunciation/different meaning) 'heteronyms' (same spelling, different pronunciation, different meaning) An Indian boy in my class (secondary school) made the mistake of doing a two-page paper on a bath when the rest of came to the understanding the teacher meant Bath; the place.

A true story and an example to demonstrate the difficulty of words with multiple meaning (in this case a homograph), not only that but when does the other meaning(s) 'situational context' figure? A commendable 'linguistic competence' level of semantics certainly brings us a step closer to knowing a language, the bad news is after achieving all this we only have one word to show for it, most sentences and conversations are considerably longer. The part of the grammar that represents a speaker's knowledge of sentences and their structures is called syntax. Syntactic structure is equally as important as accurate semantics. Grammatical judgements can be made from our wealth of unconscious knowledge, instantly knowing the correct interpretation of a sentence with multiple meaning (hierarchical structure)

and who/what are the ' subject' and ' object' in a sentence (grammatical relations).

Steve (the subject) smacked Phil (the object) in the mouth. Phil (now the subject as... ) has a sore mouth (his mouth is now the object). But the foreign speaker may have trouble as languages may have different word orders within phrases and sentences.

Saying something simple in English may mean rewording it for correct translation in Japanese, German, Dutch, etc. The way some French phrasings were ordered baffled me in school. A good example found in *An Introduction to Language* (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams) is the English would say: how many students does Els teach? But the German way would be: how many students teaches Els? The function for language is simple; communication, lions roar, dogs bark and humans speak. There the parallels end, as animal systems are limited in how they express themselves controlled by stimulus and ritual.

For example; an agitated lion is limited in ways to express him/herself, most likely a roar, whereas if a human is agitated he/she has many ways to express the feelings and have control over every element; what words to use, tone, volume and explicitly what they wish to express. Unlike the bees that can only indicate via dancing they've found food, but cannot inform other bees the food is miles away like a human with extended tools (words) at their disposal with a choice to be vague or detailed (creative aspect). Our language system is not a preset program where meaning is objective, words contain ambiguity and rely on other words with their ' semantic features' to

form acute understanding, and this carried out by structure as words rearranged can 'mean' all the difference, 'this is good!' He answers. 'Is this good?' He asks.