

Linguistics as a Science

The objective study of linguistics is characterized by a scientific and systematic approach to the analysis of language. Some key characteristics of this field include:

1. **Empirical evidence:** Linguistics relies on empirical evidence derived from data analysis, observations, and experiments to form conclusions about language structure, use, and development.
2. **Systematic analysis:** Linguists use systematic methods to analyze the components of language, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.
3. **Objectivity:** Linguists strive to maintain objectivity in their research, avoiding personal biases and subjective interpretations. They aim to present findings based on factual evidence and logical reasoning.
4. **Descriptive approach:** Linguistics primarily focuses on describing and analyzing natural language as it is used by speakers and communities, rather than prescribing how language should be used.
5. **Theoretical frameworks:** Linguistics often employs various theoretical frameworks and models to understand the structure and functions of language, such as generative grammar, cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and structuralism.
6. **Interdisciplinary nature:** Linguistics frequently intersects with other fields, such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, computer science, and neuroscience, to provide a comprehensive understanding of language and its role in human communication and cognition.

By adhering to these characteristics, linguists can conduct rigorous and objective research that contributes to our understanding of language and its diverse facets.

Linguistics as the science of language

Linguistics as a scientific Study of Language

1- It may not be very difficult to define what linguistics exactly means, but definitely, the task of specifying/identifying what it is briefly is not an easy task. Actually, we run into the same problem whenever we are in a situation of defining some science or even a course of action such as 'to kill'[1]. The same problem is encountered in all scientific fields.

2- Linguists have agreed that language assumes three basic functions. A cognitive function in communicating ideas, an affective one in conveying emotions, and an affective one in conveying desires

4- The basic units of grammatical study are those sounds or sound sequences that are meaningful in the language.

Some characteristics of the linguistic study of language

Ever since the advent of structuralism with De Saussure, linguistic study of language has been characterized by two properties.

a- Linguistics is a scientific study

This stands for the most bold and important claim made by linguists. Linguists claim that they are using means and methods that qualify their study of language to being referred to as scientific. They see their approach as being empirical, methodical, exact and, consequently, objective. These characteristics are what distinguish scientific study of language from unscientific and / or nonscientific ones.

An unscientific study would be defined as the one which does not use a method in a consistent way. This inconsistency makes of its results / findings unpredictable and as such not verifiable by others working in the same field. The nonscientific study would be one with a method but where empirical evidence is not required. In addition, its findings may be verified by others since the study would be using a method.

b- Linguistics is descriptive

Modern study of language (read post-Saussurian study) qualifies as being different from the traditional ways of studying language in that it is a scientific study, primarily a descriptivist analysis of language. Traditional studies have been in their large part prescriptivist. Prescriptivist studies focus on differentiating correct usage from the incorrect one. Descriptivist studies, on the opposite, focus on reporting what native speakers of language say, just as they hear it. The scientific study of language claims that there is nothing in the sounds themselves that would qualify them as right or wrong.

Characteristics of language:

To be able to carry out an accurate description of language, linguists have found it useful to delimit a set of basic characteristics that distinguish language. In what follows, we introduce ten of these characteristics that have gathered the consent of many linguists.

Language is sound: speech has primacy over writing which tries to represent speech. Taking language to be primarily speech, the linguist makes room for taking advantage of the fact that all human beings produce speech sounds with essentially the same equipment if we can say so. Once this is accepted, then an accurate description of the speech sounds produced by humans is made possible through accounting for the movement of the articulatory organs that produce them.

Language is linear: It is a linear succession of sounds which are produced through successive movements of the speech organs. Our representation of these sounds should, through the use of appropriate symbols, be linear to parallel the order in which those sounds are produced.

Language is systematic: In part, language is systematic because it is possible to describe it using a finite number of symbols that can combine only in a limited number of ways. The possible combinations of linearity and systematic restrictions of combinations provide us with a convenient tool to describe and compare languages be it at the sound system level or the syntactic system level.

Language is a system of systems: languages have different systems (phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic) which are independent of each other but which have this ability of operating simultaneously. Each of these systems has its own units and combinatory rules and restrictions.

Language is meaningful: the fact that sounds are connected with every facet of human life and communication is the reason that gives rise to the interest in its study by linguists, scholars and others.

Language is arbitrary: only one language would exist if there were to be a direct relation between the nature of the thing being referred to and the linguistic unit used to express it. Arbitrariness is the cause for the existence of more than one language. Onomatopoeic words are not to be considered as counterexamples of the above claim.

Language is conventional: people use language according to fixed analogical rules. One consequence of this characteristic is that linguists are confident that description of one representative speaker is applicable to the speech habits of others in the same speech community.

Language is a system of contrasts: Linguists find it interesting to subject language to study because of the variety of differences that this system offers at the various levels of linguistic analysis. Just how these differences are made is not considered to be of importance to the linguist.

Language is creative: Speakers of a language are credited with the ability to produce novel sentences and to understand sentences they are hearing for the first time ever. The creativity of language can also be seen in the imaginative manipulations of the various linguistic systems by poets and creative writers and how these extend our awareness about the relations holding among things.

Languages are unique Any two languages may differ in a lot of things, the possible combinations of sounds that they accept in different positions, the number of parts of speech that they have, etc. And this is what makes languages unique and we learn new things whenever we embark on learning a foreign language.

Languages are similar Even though, learning a foreign language could be acknowledged as a difficult task, it is made easier by those similarities that languages are claimed to have. Similarity is also apparent when we talk of language families, the Romance group, the Germanic group, the Semitic group, etc.,

Some Characteristics of Linguistic analysis

1 A basic characteristic of language study / analysis is that all the units of language are stated in terms of sounds or sound differences. Since all language is meaningful, all the units are established according to the meanings or meaning differences that they point to/express. Another property is that given the arbitrary nature of language, the relation holding between sound and meaning will be indirect.

2 Language study focuses on the study of the patterns of sounds and the sequences of sounds in any given language. Such a focus makes of this study a formal one. It is also a study that is referred to as a structural study. This is so since it makes of the contrasts

among units and patterns of units another of its primary focuses. Thus, each linguistic unit is definable in terms of three characteristics: composition, distribution and function.

3 **The composition of linguistic units.** This will help us define the unit through listing its component parts in such a way that we can distinguish it from others that may have fewer or more components. Hence, sounds are defined in terms of the place and manner of their articulation. Larger units are described in terms of the morphemes/words making them up, etc.

4 **The distribution of linguistic units:** linguistic units are defined in terms of their distribution in relation to each other (Syntagmatic relations, i.e., what occurs with what, when and how, to be contrasted with Paradigmatic relations holding between items of the class). Under this heading, we talk about the linguistic environment where a linguistic unit in a given shape occurs.

5 **The function of linguistic units:** Here reference is made to the use of the units. That is what they do. Every linguistic unit will have at least a differential function. It will provide us with a clue to differentiate one message from another: e.g. the sound /p/ in /pit/ as opposed to the sound /b/ in /bit/. In addition to this differential function, linguistic units will have a referential function. By this is meant that there will be among users of the language an agreement over a conventional connection between the units and some aspect of the non-linguistic environment. E.g. naming.

6 Linguists analyse both the sounds and the sounds sequences that make up language. They also study the messages about the non-linguistic environment being conveyed by these sounds. Any linguist focusing on the formal properties cannot ignore the content side of language.