MAHATMA EDUCATION SOCIETY'S

PILLAI HOC COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & RESEARCH.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSE – 3 (IC 3)

LANGUAGE ACROSS CURRICULUM

MODULE I - UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE & LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

Unit 1 (a & b) – Concept and Characteristics of Language

The word '**language**' is derived from the Latin word `**lingua**' which means `**tongue**.' Thus, language relates to something that is spoken or for which the tongue is used.

Some Definitions:

Block and Trager: `Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group operates and interacts.'

 Jesperson: `Language is a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings. It is, therefore, a purposeful activity'.

Nature of language:

 ➢ Language is a combination of sound
 ➢ Words have meanings
 ➢ Language follow the grammatical structure
 ➢ Language is based on aural and oral system
 ➢ language can be die and extinct
 ➢ language can be diverse
 ➢ language is unique

Characteristics/ Nature of language are as follows:

1. **Language is learnt:** No person is born knowing a language; he acquires it from the society into which he is born. Language it learnt through effort, imitation and practice.
2. **Language is a system:** Every language is a unique system which consists of sounds, structures and vocabulary. A person who wants to learn a new language will have to learn new sounds, new structures and new vocabulary. The sound system of language differs from language to language depending upon the specific use of vowels and consonants that the society uses. Each language has its own system of vocabulary.
3. **Language is also a system of systems:** Each language, which is a system by itself, consists of various sub-systems. There are phonological and grammatical systems in all languages. There are several sub systems within a language. The phonology of a language forms its own system as the various sounds function in a systematic way.
4. **Language consists of symbols:** Each language works through symbols. Different words used in a language are the symbols. They stand for certain things. The language

will function well if its symbols are known both to the speaker and the person for whom they are being used.

For example the world 'gas' has three sounds (G, Л, S) It is a symbol of English because a meaning is attached to it. But if we take the same three sounds like, G, Л, S they also form 'sag', which is also a word in English but has a very different meaning from the original word.

5. **Symbols of language are vocal:** Different symbols are used in a single language. These symbols are vocal. Language is primarily used in speech. Only speech provides all essential signals of a language. Non-vocal symbols such as gestures, signal flags are visual symbols and ringing of the bells and beating of a drum are auditory symbols but they do not form any language. In language the sounds are produced through vocal organs. Reading and writing are no doubt important. But speech is the basic form of language. A language without speech is unthinkable.

6. **Symbols of language are Arbitrary:** Here by arbitrary symbols we meant that there is no visual relationship between the language item and the object for which it stands. A man is called man traditionally. There is no visual similarity between the symbol 'man' and the actual man. We have not named it so on the basis of some logic or scientific principles. In English we say Man, in 'Hindi' we say 'Aadmi' and in Sanskrit we say 'Purush'. None of them is better than the other. In fact, we call a man 'man' because people have agreed to use it in that sense.

7. **Language is culture/ society specific:** Every language is shaped by the society in which it is practiced as well as the culture that exists at that specific time-period. Thus every language is the product of society in which it is practiced. It is not possible to separate the language from the culture in which it exists. The vocabulary used has meaning only in relation to that society and culture.

8. **Language is species specific:** Animals communicate mainly through the use of sounds, odour or body movement. All other species of animals (even plants) communicate but only humans use sophisticated language as the primary means of communication.

9. **Language is for communication:** The primary purpose of any language is communication and self expressions. Human beings express their ideas, thoughts, feelings and emotions through language. In this way language is a means to connect past present and future.

Unit 1 C – Function of Language

Language has the following three important function to play in life:

1. Intellectual Development
2. Emotional Development
3. Social Development

1. **Role of Language in Intellectual Development**

All living beings communicate with each other via sounds or gestures. A language is the code or symbol system that is used for communicating thoughts.

Here exist two schools of thoughts regarding the relationship between language and thoughts

The first school believes that language is the vocalisation of thoughts. Psychologists like Bruner and Vygotsky belong to this school. According to them, both thought and language are the same. Language helps an individual to verbalise his thoughts. It allows children to progress from the sensory-motor and pre-operational thoughts to more abstract levels of thoughts.

The second school of thought is advocated by psychologists like Piaget who believe that thoughts and language are two separate aspects and that thought precedes language. Language only builds on thoughts as can be seen by the study of deaf children.

Thus we can say that language plays the following intellectual role:

1. It is through language that one can express one's thoughts, feelings, needs, desires etc. Thus, language is the basic tool for thinking.
2. Language helps an individual to express abstract things and ideas.
3. It is through language that higher order thinking can be done.
4. Language is the tool through which ideas, discoveries, inventions etc. are conceived and communicated.

Role of Language in Emotional Development

Man is an emotional being. He feels and loves to express his feelings through words and gestures. Man loves to build relationship and values those relationships because of certain vested emotions. Relations like family, child, friends, acquaintances etc are not only social relations but also emotional ones. Language, thus has a very important role to play in the emotional development of a child.

1. Languages help us to feel and express our emotions.
2. It helps to communicate feelings especially when there is a distance between two people and only words can be used.
3. It helps to articulate and form relationships which adds to a person's emotional development.
4. Expressing emotions has helped develop certain forms of language which are entirely emotional such as poetry, dramas, songs etc.

Role of Language in Social Development

Language is social in nature. It operates in a social context and acquires meaning and significance in a social interaction.

1. Language helps a community to define its uniqueness. Language is one of the means by which we know which group we belong to.
2. It is a means of communication between members of a community or even between communities.

3. Every society has some written or unwritten laws and rules. Language helps us to codify these laws and rules.

Besides the above classification, we can also classify the function of language as follows:

Geoffery Leech (1974) mentioned the following five functions of language has five. They are:

Informational – This is assumed to be the most important function of language. This function concentrates on the message. It is used to give new information. It depends on truth and value of what is being said.

Expressive - "Language has an expressive function, that is, it can be used to express its originator's feelings and attitudes - swear words and exclamations are the most obvious instance of this". **Geoffery Leech (1974).** The speaker or writer of this function tries to express his feelings. He or she reflexes his or her impression. This function could give a clear image for the personality of the speaker or writer. The best example of this kind is Poetry and literature. In fact, this function evoke certain feelings and express feelings. Examples of this kind are, I am very happy or I spent a wonderful vacation. We can see from the previous examples that they reflex the feelings of the speaker or the writer.

Directive - The directive function aims to influence the behaviour or attitudes of others. The most straightforward instances of the directive function are commands and requests. This function of social control places emphasis on the receiver's end, rather than the originator's end of the message.

Aesthetic - The fourth function is the aesthetic function, which is " the use of language for the sake of the linguistic artifact itself, and for no purpose. This aesthetic function can have at least as much to do with conceptual as with affective meaning" Geoffery Leech(1974). E.g. poems and dramas.

Phatic - According to Leech, the fifth function is the phatic function. " the function of keeping communication lines open,and keeping social relationships in good repair (in Britain culture, talking about the weather is a well-known example of this)". Geoffery Leech(1974). We can say about this function that it is used for normal talks. An example of this, when two people meet each other accidently in a place. They start talking about something unimportant for the sake of communication like, How are you? How are your children? And so on.

Questions Bank

Questions: 10 Marks

1. 'Language is a set of human habits.' Elaborate the given sentence with reference to the meaning and nature of Language.
2. Explain/Elucidate the meaning and characteristics of language.
3. Elucidate the function of Language.

Short Notes: 5 Marks

a) Concept of Language
b) Any five characteristics of language
c) Any two functions of language