FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER

1st SEMESTER 2020

ASSIGNMENT 1

INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS (ILG511S)
Dear Student

I have just finished marking your assignments. It is my pleasure to write you this letter aimed at updating and giving you feedback with regards to the general comments I have about Assignment 1 and especially pointing out where you need to improve so that you can excel.

1. Question analysis

Question 1

Nearly all students had problems with this question, mainly because they copied either from the internet or from the Study Guide.

The following were some of the weaknesses evident in your responses:

- Incorrect definitions with no evidence that the student had read the study guide. In addition, there was no consultation of other sources to help one understand the features or characteristics of language.

- Wrong examples used to support the discussion. Examples had to be drawn from the given passage. Additionally, the relevant examples should be explained to show how they relate to the language features/characteristics.

- In some cases, examples were relevant, but unfortunately, they were not used to illustrate the different features of language. Please note that, a response that divorces the two is not adequate.

The following could be used as a plan before writing the final draft:
i. **Language is displaced means:**

Displacement literally means “not placed.” Displacement refers to two traits of language.

Firstly, displacement refers to the fact that all human language has the ability to refer to the past, present and future. E.g. “Last week, I received... (past tense). Accept relevant examples.

Secondly, displacement indicates that all languages allow speakers to refer to various locations. Every language has the ability to refer to places which are not necessarily present for the speaker. E.g. She went to Oshakati.

- Human language is displaced in terms of time and location.
- All humans can refer to present, past and future in any real or fictitious location.
- All languages allow speakers to refer to various locations.
- On the other hand animal communication describes the ‘here & now,’ the immediate moment, has limited displacement. E.g. Bee language: dance routine to communicate the location of nectar.

ii. **Language is arbitrary means:**

The word “arbitrary” means random. This property therefore indicates that there is no natural link between a word and the object it represents. The meaning of a word is assigned “arbitrarily” (randomly) based on social convention. For instance, there is no natural link between the word “e-mail” and the object called an e-mail. There is no link between “girl” and the object called a girl. You can select any word from the passage, e.g. “chair” or “bear” and say how other languages refer to it. There is no logical relationship between the speech sounds and what it represents. Thus, arbitrariness refers to the fact that there is no “natural” connection between a linguistic form and its meaning. The relationship between signifier and signified is established by convention.

- nothing in the sound sequence of the word denotes its meaning, except for onomatopoeic words.
- arbitrary meaning is a matter of societal convention
- the same concept referred to in different names in different languages.

iii. **Language productivity/creativity means:**

Human beings can produce and understand an infinite number of sentences using a finite number of rules. This property of language is called recursiveness.

All languages have endless possibilities and all language speakers can create an endless number of sentences. E.g. new words roommate; lockdown; social distancing etc.

iv. **Language is human means:**
Because human beings can produce sounds (Phonetics and phonology), humans are the only species that can learn and acquire language. Humans are the only animals with the cognitive patterns highly organised enough to produce speech. Humans also developed vocal cords that are less thick and fatty than our primate relatives, so we are able to speak. For example, we can produce the sounds /p/ and /m/ using our lips; and /t/ using the teeth and tongue; /g/ using the tongue and palate etc. Looking at manner of articulation, /p/ and /m/ are stop sounds; animals have no place and manner of articulation and their sounds cannot be classified. Therefore, language is uniquely human. Human language is structured at two levels: (i) at the level of sounds and (ii) at the level of words. For example, sounds like a word like [big] is made up of /b/ +/i/ + /g/ sounds. Sentences are also structured; they are not random, e.g. [She climbed into the big bed and lay down] = Pronoun + verb + preposition + article + adjective + noun + conjunction + verb + preposition]. That is why Charles Hockett says that language is characterised with the duality of structure.

SEE SAMPLE BELOW: Student: 220004978

Question
This essay is written in attempt to deliberate on the various properties of language. This will be done by clarifying with examples directly from the case ‘Goldilocks and the three bears’ by Robert Southey. This will serve as a way of solidifying ones understanding of each property. Furthermore, this essay will also be divided into sub-headings, each dedicated to discuss the properties of language as is laid out in the assignment one communiqué: language is displaced, arbitrariness, productivity/creativity and language is human.

Language is displaced
In most lingua franca the literal meaning of the word displacement is ‘not placed’. With language, Trask (2007, p.77) defines displacement as “the ability to speak about things other than the here and now”. Trask (2007) extends his explanation by saying “it is the ability to talk about things other than what we can see, hear, feel and smell at the moment” .This means that as a human, one has the innate ability to refer to the past, present and future of a real or fictitious location without having to embody that specific timeframe or without being in that specific location. We can thus ascertain that human language is displaced in terms of time and location. One isn’t time or location bound.

Secondly, Trask (2007, p.78) puts forward that “displacement *...+ is one of the momentous differences between human language and the signaling systems of all other species, with one exception” e.g.:

The exception is bee language:
A honeybee scout which has discovered a source of nectar return to its hive and performs a dance, watched by the other bees. This bee dance tells the watching bees what direction the nectar lies in, how far away it is, and how much nectar there is. and this is displacement: the dancing bee is passing on information about a site which it visited some time ago and which it cannot see, and the watching bees respond by flying off to locate the nectar.
From this example one can postulate that animal communication only describes the ‘here and now’ but it has very limited displacement. Some of the examples that one could put forward to showcase the trait of displacement in terms of time and location, is in the use of the opening words of the story: ‘Once upon a time’ (this could refer to some time in the past; the time frame of the story isn’t fixed). As the story progresses, it goes on to say “One morning” which means the speaker jumps form past tense to present tense. Then eventually it reads: “In a little while” which denotes that there is a jump in the time line of the story again. Also, it is worth mentioning that the children’s nursery ‘Goldilocks and the three bears’ by Robert Southey is a fictitious story, hence the location is fictitious. Without having being there physically or literally humans have the ability to ‘visit’ this location because language allows for displacement.

**Arbitrariness**

The next property of language that will be placed under the microscope is arbitrariness. Arbitrariness is “the absence of any necessary connection between the form of a word and its meaning” (Trask, 2007, p. 22). This basically means that a language has a specific word to denote an object, activity or concept that a speaker wants to talk about. Each such word spoken must be formed in a valid manner according to the phonological rules of the language. For example the word ‘house’ in the story. ‘House’ is a word assigned “arbitrarily” based on social convention to denote an object in which one lives in. This convention is why the same object (or noun, in this scenario) has different names in different languages. Examples of the word *house* translate to “huis”, “maison” and “casa”. All these words are random syllables which have been assigned various objects in the world. The meaning of a word is assigned arbitrarily based on the social convention.

**Language is creative/ productive**

According to Trask (2007, p. 233) language productivity is “...the degree of freedom with which a particular grammatical pattern can be extended to new cases. We often speak of productivity in connection with patterns of word formation”. In the case of Goldilocks and the three bears the adverb ‘too’ is used frequently to refer to something that will occur in abundance. The grammatical pattern will thus render one with a lot of possibilities or variations of how the word ‘too’ can be used. For example: - porridge *too* hot,-porridge was *too* cold, she was *too* heavy and the bed was *too* soft etc. With each clause the word ‘too’ is used but the case differs every time. Productivity is but one of the facets of language.

**Language is human**

Bertrand Russell once posed the question: “ How comes it that human beings , whose contacts with the world are brief and personal and limited, are nevertheless able to know as much as they do ?(Akmajian et al,2001, p. 477). One could say that the answer to this is: *language is human*. According to Trask (2007, p. 140) we have a “biological ability to use language. Human beings are the only creatures on earth that uses language”. Linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) used the term “langage” to refer to what we now refer to as our language faculty or Noam Chomsky’s (1965) “innateness hypothesis”.
Both ultimately postulates that humans are the only animals with the cognitive patterns highly organized and evolved enough to produce speech. So whether your contact with the world may be limited, the ability of language acquisition in human beings is ultimately the one feature that differentiates us from other species. In the case of Goldilocks and the three bears it reads that Father Bear looked around, and then roared with a growly voice: “Somebody has been sitting in my chair”. Bears cannot speak. It is plausible to say that the bear did growl in anger but to say that the bear spoke would literally be impossible, because human beings are the only species that use speech to communicate.

Another example: Student: 220036756

Question 1

Displacement. This is the capability of a language, and actually, all languages, to refer to different timeframes. When we are having a conversation we may talk about something that happened yesterday, years ago, that may occur soon, etc. This is well brought up in the passage as the whole story takes place in the past. We see the use of verbs in the past tense, along with expressions such as “once upon a time”, “one morning” and indicating the girl coming in the house at a time that the bears were out. We also notice the use of time related adverbs like “then”, “when”, “while” and “again’. The property of displacement thus allows speakers to refer to happenings not only in the present but also at other times.

Language is displaced. This property allows a language to express occurrences across space. Users may then talk about places and locations different from the one they're in during a conversation. In the story this is shown as Goldilocks and the three bears are in different places at the time of the development of the story. The main characters are said to be “in the house” or to go “in the forest”, which are larger areas. Displacement can also be used in smaller settings such as the girl sitting in different chairs and moving from one bed to the other. Finally, this property can also be used to describe motions as seen at the end the girl runs “down the stairs” “into the forest”. This property helps storytelling come to life as it involves different sites.

Arbitrariness. This indicates that there is no actual connection between the way a word sounds and the meaning it conveys. This is a valid statement for most of the words in any language, but there are a few exceptions, the most know of which is the onomatopoeia. The onomatopoeia is a figure of speech whose words replicate the sound of what they represent. These words are in everyday speech, and since almost all words are arbitrary, the easiest way to highlight this property is by showing the words that don’t abide by it. In the text we can find words like “roar”, “growl” and “squeak”, all used to indicate the way one of the characters speaks. These words mimic the sound they stand for. Most other words, instead, don't and thus are arbitrary.

Productivity/Creativity. There are infinite combinations of words to create different sentences with various meanings. A person with mastery over a language can formulate thousands of combinations and not only that, but is also able to “play around” with a language. This includes making “puns”, jokes and using figures of speech that vary from the way people usually express themselves. In the case there’s not much conversation. We can notice though that Little bear is able to follow the parents’ dialogue and add to it. For example, he says someone sat and broke his chair, ate and finished his porridge or that someone was presently sleeping in his bed. Looking at the bigger picture, this language property allows fiction in itself to be imagined and told as a person can create an entirely different scenario from the one they're in and express it in words.
Language is Human. Finally, language is human. This means that language system as we know it is so complex that it’s exclusive to the human species. Only humans can articulate sounds in such a refined way and have the brain power to send and understand these signals. In the story we find the characters being able to hold a conversation and use the functions of language, informing each other and expressing emotion. There is also the presence of variations in pitch and the dynamics of how a sentence is said, to convey anger or frustration. The adult male has a lower, louder voice, whereas the female has a kinder, quiet voice, typical of humans. There is also some irony in this as the main characters are bears, which don’t normally speak, in fiction this is know as personalisation. In a way, all the properties of language fit under this one as they contribute to differentiating between human and animal language. All the properties of language put together make it possible for a wide range of topics to be discussed in conversation. They also give space to fiction and imagination to be part of culture and society.

Question 2

The question focused on the functions of language.

Most of the definitions of the functions of language were satisfactory. The challenge faced by most of you was giving relevant examples to support the definitions.

The responses to this question showed that very minimal reading was done. Let me take this opportunity to urge you to read broadly; it is the only way to enhance and sharpen your knowledge in the discipline of Linguistics.

The overall performance on this question was average. It was disappointing to note that the majority of you just discussed the functions without attempting to relate them to the given text.

You were supposed to study the case carefully, understand its meaning and then identify and explain how the three functions of language are illustrated in the text.

Expressive function

Expressive function → language is used to express feelings and emotions.

- The focus is on content/subject matter.
- Communication is oriented towards the content or subject matter.
- Communicates emotions, beliefs, opinions, attitudes
- Expresses emotions e.g. love, fear, anxiety, dislike etc.
- Reports feelings or attitudes of the writer (or speaker), or of the subject, or evokes feelings in the reader (or listener).

For example, in the text (see sample essay).

Directive function:
Directive function → focus language that gives orders or directives. Language used to communicate tasks to others. Language is used to persuade or influence the recipient; to give orders, command or instructions. At times it can be in the form of a request. It:

- is communication oriented towards influencing the recipient
- plays a regulatory function and involves a mental process.
- persuades the recipient through instructions, requests, commands etc.

Is the function of language which engages the Addressee (receiver) directly and is best illustrated by vocatives and imperatives, e.g. “Tom! Come inside and eat!” Language is used to persuade or influence the recipient; to give orders, command or instructions. At times it can be in the form of a request.

It includes the following:

a) Imperatives:
Imperatives are statements which give direct orders:
- Give me your name.
- Dial 911 for assistance.
- Clean the floors today.

b) Requests/Informative statements:
- Speaker to a taxi driver: “I’m going to Soweto Market.”
- Parent to child: “Can you please clean your room today?”
- Customer: “My house is located in Luxury Hill.”
- Driver: “Can you please sms those directions to me?”

The directive function, therefore, gives orders, commands or directions.

The informative function:

Informative function → language is used to provide information.

The focus is on content/subject matter.

- Communication is oriented towards the content or subject matter.
- Communication conveys concrete, objective information about the content
- Prominent in news reporting, science writing & courtroom testimony etc.
- Used when you describe something
- Also, when you inform others about something

The above could be used as your plan. Then proceed to use the information to write an essay. See Student:220004978 below.

**Question 2**
This essay is written in attempt to elaborate on the functions of language. This will be done by highlighting the different properties with examples from the case of Goldilocks and the three bears.
Directive Function
This is the function of language which engages the receiver directly and it is best illustrated by vocatives and imperatives. Imperatives play an integral role with this function of language, because they are statements which give direct orders or commands to the person being addressed (addressee). Vocative expression or vocatives is a direct address in which the identity of party spoken to is set forth expressly within a sentence.

Expressive function
As this function suggests, language allows expression. In Layman’s terms this means that it is based on expressing emotions, feelings and desires. For example when Robert Southey writes in the story that “by now [Goldilocks] was feeling rather tired” and “*she was+ all cosy and warm and in no time at all she fell asleep”. The writer uses these words deliberately to express her exhaustion and evokes a feeling of tiredness in the reader. Secondly, he uses the word **cosy** and **warm** to express her comfort as she fell asleep and evokes a feeling of contentment with the reader. One can argue that all expressive language may be analyzed into two component elements, namely that it reports on the feelings and attitude of the writer (or speaker), or of the subject, or evokes feelings in the reader (or listener). Expressive language one could say is characteristically fulfilled by 1st person utterances in the subjunctive.

Informative function
This means that language serves as a means of parlaying specific information, i.e. to inform. The type of information being given is usually factual. The informative function of language also allows for specific descriptions and ideas to be conveyed. The informative function is encountered daily as is observed when discussing analytical reports, making various descriptions and even when in argument with someone. It is used in everyday conversations. Informative language makes uses of declarative statements as is used in the case of Goldilocks and the three bears, by Robert Southey; “SOMEBODY HAS BEEN EATING MY PORRIDGE”. This statement declarative and informative, placing emphasis on something that is factual. Father Bears basically tells (informs) the rest of his family that something is amiss.

All the functions of language is very important to become a fluent speaker of a language exhibiting both linguistic competence and performance.

Reference List:
3. Ferdinand de Saussure, (1916). The course of General Linguistics (Cours de linguistigue generale).

Another example: Student: 220036756
Although this was too short, the essay structure is evident.

Question 2
Language is part of our everyday life, it’s the main way we communicate. Depending on circumstance, there are many different things we may want to say and language is the primary tool we use. Thus, language divides in four main groups depending on the purpose of a given exchange. These are: expressive, directive, informative and phatic or “small talk”, which we won’t discuss today.

First, expressive language is used to transmit emotion and feeling, it is often found in poetry and works where the general sentiment is most valued. We use this language when we want to make others aware of our state of mind. We find this in the story by the way Father bear exclaims in frustration. Or how Little bear squeaks in an accusatory manner.

Second, directive speech is the language of orders and commands. Often using imperative verbs. Some directive sentences may be easily identifiable, some may be disguised and confused with informative function. Thus we rely on context to understand what the aim of a sentence may be. In the passage there aren’t any, but if Little bear exclaimed “get out of my bed!” to Goldilocks upon finding her, that would have been an example of directive function.

Third, informative function is arguably the most used function in written works as it makes up for all the narration. This language is used to give information, context or setting. In the story, the first half of the text is purely informative. In the dialogue we see Mother bear stating facts plainly, to simply inform her family. Thus this function is used to state truths, furnish details or describe an environment.

These functions are vital for human interaction, along with body language, context, etc. they provide the key elements that make human communication come to life.

Referencing
Some students were able to reference their work correctly using the APA referencing style; however, quite a number had no clue how this should be done. Refer to the study guide and note examples of references at the end of the chapter and within the chapter. Try to cultivate a reading culture in
yourself; it is the only way you can note some of these issues that I have pointed out in this letter. Because your second assignment requires you to research and have a reference list, I have given referencing examples below. Note that these are not exhaustive; hence I encourage you to buy the APA reference guide from the library.

In-text citation:

- According to Hughes (1962:5), language is “...any means of expressing thought.”
- In addition, language may be defined as “...a conventional system of habitual vocal behaviour by which members of a community communicate with one another.” (Chao, 1968:1)

Reference List:

Book with one Author:


Book with two Authors:


N.B. Please do not include Wikipedia in your reference list. You can use it but it is not acceptable as an academic reference.
The APA Referencing guide is also available at the Main Library for N$30.00. I advise that you get a copy to get used to the APA referencing style before embarking on the next assignment.

Conclusion

As your Tutor Marker I would like to encourage you to work harder in your next assignment and keep aiming higher. Bear in mind that marks are not given but awarded and where there is evidence of hard work it is rewarded handsomely.

I wish you all the best in Assignment 2. Read the Study Guide thoroughly; make use of it exhaustively, as well as any other reading materials you can find. You are also welcome to write your comments at the back of the assignment booklet so that I can hear from you with regards to the assignment, either what you enjoyed or the challenges you met. Some of you are doing that and it is appreciated. I hope that these comments will be put into effect. I thank you very much for conscientiously working through your assignments.

I wish you all the best in your studies and I am looking forward to well researched work in the next assignment. Please do not hesitate to call or email us if you have any query concerning assignments.
Your Tutor

Dr Juliet Pasi