


**Subject name: Language and Society**  
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Today we will talk about two particular aspects which will help us understand the relationship between language and society in greater details. The first is knowledge of language and second is about language and A language distinction. These are crucial for the understanding of language and society. The understanding and clarity on these terms are mandatory for such an understanding. Now let us look at these things one by one

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Nature of Language

- Innate
- Competence and Performance
- Rules of language use
- Which part of language is innate and which part of it is specifically learnt?
- Fluidity in a continuum



We would like to underline certain aspects of nature of language first before we get to knowledge of language. We have established rather tried to make an attempt to understand the innate nature of language which in a way is about the following

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## Innateness

- Birds fly, fish swim, and humans speak.
- “Man has instinctive tendency to speak as we see in the babbles of our children while no child has an instinctive tendency to bake, brew, and write.”

- Charles Darwin



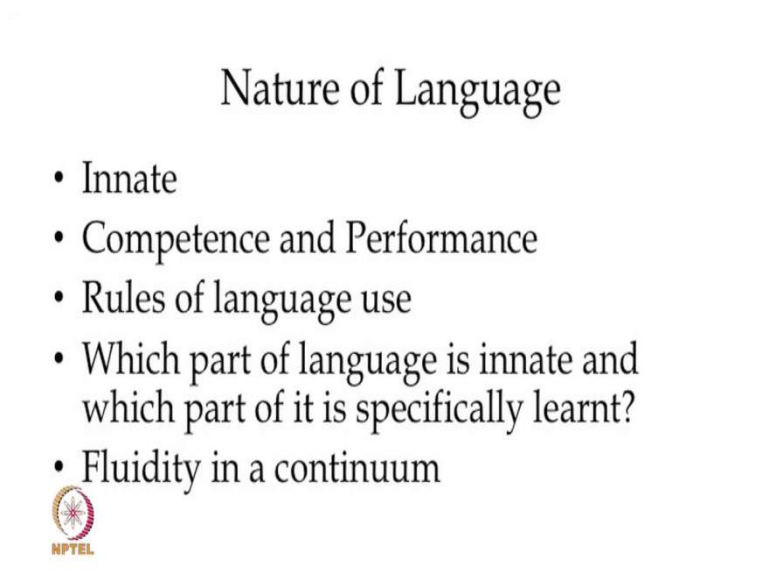
When Darwin says man has intrinsic tendency to speak as we see in the babbles of our children while no child has an intrinsic tendency to bake, brew and write. We have underlined this aspect in two terms. This simply means that the capacity to speak and more so the development of this capacity to speak in a child is innate in the sense that it starts way too early and this tendency is natural and it develops through a natural process.

However, other elements, other activities like baking, writing, dancing, driving and each one of them require efforts. Some children may learn or may not learn these things, depending upon the interest and effort children put in these things or grown up people put in these things. We also try to underline that these activities like baking, writing, reading, riding, flying, dancing and among all of them, I want to I want you to keep in mind particularly two activities that I am mentioning specifically reading and writing because we want to make a distinction that reading and writing two skills related to language are not comparable with the ability to speak.

This is where, we have to make a distinction between the innate nature of language that only speaking part is innate, whereas reading and writing comes after putting in effort. All of them require except speaking all other activities that we have mentioned, require some sort of maturity at some level, some sort of physical maturity at some level this includes walking as well. Alright.


So let us come back to the main point. This helps us understand to a great extent that language speaking language learning to speak language is the innate ability of human's just like birds learns to fly, fish learn to swim, humans begin to speak. That is one of the parts of the Nature of language.

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Nature of Language

- Innate
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And what follows from here is the idea of competence, the development of rules in form of development of ability to speak. What happens in human mind is called the development of competence, in particular, linguistic competence. An understanding of linguistic competence is very important for us to understand what we mean by linguistic performance and linguistic performance is about rules of languages use.

So, we are looking at these elements to understand these terms particularly, because at one point, or probably along the way, we are going to see the performance is not so, out of what is considered part of competence. Of course, performance is about the rules of language use in the real world. But performance essentially and eventually is part of linguistic competence is what we will need to understand, in order to understand the true nature of language in the real world. We also want to understand which part of language is innate and which part of it is specifically learnt.

We have seen some of the discussions about it in understanding Darwin's definition and Darwin's understanding of language as an innate capacity of human. We have also looked at two terms like fluidity and continuum while understanding language and variety. We would specify this once again as part of the nature of language for us to understand or for us to develop an understanding of knowledge of language. These two terms specifically help us understand the point that language may not be accountable entity.

It is that the true nature of language is fluid and that is because it keeps varying all the time. Languages vary, languages change from one point to the other point on a continuum. Such observable changes which are linguistically grounded at the level of sounds, at the level of words, at the level of sentences and at the level of at the level of discourses primarily help us understand the real nature of language in the real world. This will lead us to develop our understanding of knowledge of language in little bit explicit term. Let us see what the, what we mean by Knowledge of language.

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## What do we mean when we say we **KNOW** language?

- Know has a specific meaning
- Knowledge of language makes language special purpose cognitive ability
- This is that kind of knowledge which we know but we do not know that we know.



To understand the idea of knowledge of language, we need to answer this question. An answer to this question that we mean by knowledge of language, what do we mean when we say we know our

language. Take a look at this slide very carefully and take a look at the term “know”. I have specifically tried to put word “know” in bold caps and also in red. Because whenever we see knowledge of language and whenever we use the term “know” in the context of language, it has got specialised meaning. It includes, it may include the knowledge of language used as well. But it definitely means much more than that and that much more part is also important to understand in order to understand the knowledge of language use.

So what is the specific about “know”? We will try to understand this also we will try to spell it out. But let us take it as what follows from our discussion so far or what we will try to make it make clear little bit later as well. That knowledge of language makes language special purpose cognitive ability. I will spend a few minutes on cognitive ability once again. And then we will talk about what we mean by knowledge of language becoming special purpose cognitive ability.

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## What do we mean when we say we **KNOW** language?

- ‘Know’ has a specific meaning.
- Knowledge of language makes language special purpose cognitive ability.
- This is the kind of knowledge which we know but do not know that we know.



Whenever we say, a language is a product of human mind, it definitely becomes part of the cognitive ability of humans. It is, of course, biologically grounded. It is species specific ability, that is only humans have this ability, to speak the way humans do. And it is definitely hard wired at right from the time of the birth of normal human child. All these things are given and therefore it becomes a cognitive ability. But again while understanding Darwin's idea of innateness, we have mentioned several capabilities and this time I will mention only a few.

Speaking on one side, reading, writing, dancing, flying, swimming on the other side. The effort of cognitive scientist has been on the unification of these two sides that is they have been trying to come up with an explanation which covers all the activities together as one cognitive ability. However, the knowledge of language and how people learn language, how children learn language brings set of new questions for cognitive scientists to answer. And in order to answer this questions, either by cognitive scientists or in a joint collaboration with linguistics and computer scientist and cognitive scientist together, we come to a conclusion that speaking is definitely and naturally different from rest of the abilities that humans have. Therefore it has been therefore these terms came up : General purpose cognitive ability and Special purpose cognitive ability.

Language, particularly, knowledge of language which is related to competence and speaking part of language is considered as special purpose cognitive ability. And everything else is part of general purpose cognitive ability and cognitive scientists have been able to explain very well with the help of several types of algorithms how all other types of cognitive abilities, all other types of abilities of humans which are cognitive in nature are put in one. It will be nice to include all of them together and to explain as one. However we only have efforts so far.

So moving on, we want to understand now what do we mean, when we say, we know language. We also want to keep one of one sentence in mind that what makes this knowledge specific. is One of the biggest mysteries and one of the biggest things that scholars from various domains of knowledge ranging from Philosophy, Mathematics, Biology to Sociology and all other kinds of known domains of human knowledge. I have been trying to attempt to understand this mystery and I am trying to summarise this mystery in one sentence which is the following.

Knowledge of language is the kind of knowledge which we have, which we know but we do not know that we know that. Let me repeat this again we know but we do not know that we know. What a mystery?

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## What do we mean when we say we **KNOW** language?

- ‘Know’ has a specific meaning.
- Knowledge of language makes language special purpose cognitive ability.
- This is the kind of knowledge which we know but do not know that we know.



How is it possible that we know but we do not know that we know? But that is the fact of life about language and I will explain with examples what we really mean by this sentence.

Let us take for example, for a native speaker of language and here by “native speaker” I mean he language which we grew up with, the language of the surrounding when we were growing. That becomes naturally the native language of anybody. We will have a discussion on mother tongue native language and few more terms little later in the course. And these are also required elements for an understanding of language use.

But for the time being, let us underline the idea of native language, the language we grew up with and the language of the surroundings where we are growing. So there are several unique capacities of native speakers one or few of them are the following. Native speakers have unique capacity to make a judgement about the grammaticality of a sentence in no time. The speaker of a language can make a judgement whether a given sentence is grammatical or not and here is an example of again what I am saying.

Suppose we have a sentence in Hindi, “Ram ghar jatha hai”. Speaker of Hindi will take no time to adjust grammaticality with sentence. Take another sentence “Ram ghar jathi hai”. Again the speaker of language namely Hindi, in this case again, will take no time, will make a judgement that this sentence is not grammatical. In other words, this sentence is not acceptable to the speaker. The speaker may have the capacity to explain why this is ungrammatical but speaker does not necessarily have to have the capacity to overt capacity to explain why the sentence why one is grammatical and the other one

is ungrammatical. The capacity to make this judgement is part of the knowledge and is part of what we say we know and why the speaker may not explain ungrammaticality of the sentence is the part that I say we know but we do not know that we know.

And here is the do not know part coming in. I do not know how to explain why something is ungrammatical. But I know for sure something is ungrammatical and I take no time to make this judgement. Just take another sentence, it might be very easy for someone to talk about agreement features of Hindi sentences, "Ram ghar jaatha hai and Ram gar jhaathi hai". Let us take a set of two more sentences, "Maine doodh peeya" or to make it more specific we can say "Seetha ne doodh peeya." Now this sentence is grammatical for all the speakers of Hindi.

We can say one more sentence, "Seetha ne Movie dekhi". Take another sentence, "Ram ne movie dekhi". This sentence is grammatical too. No speaker of the Hindi who will use "ne" in their language would say anything otherwise. However, "Seetha ne movie dekhi" and "Ram ne movie dekhi", why the two sentences are grammatical and why Ram does not agree with the word "dekhi" it is difficult for speakers of Hindi to explain. In my personal experience, I have checked this with so many speakers of the language in the classes, outside the class and in my research as well. We do not need to really establish the point that I am saying. However you can try this and you can make your own experiment and then make the conclusion on the basis of your experiment.

Every speaker would agree with the grammaticality error but will find it difficult to explain a lot of grammaticalities and ungrammaticalities. This is what we explain we know that but we do not know that we know. This is what we mean and this is what makes, when we say we know language specific and this is what is called knowledge of language. This is what is called innate knowledge of language, in-built knowledge of language. And this is why I said, this is what people mean, when they say, this is one of the mysteries. Let me tell you one more example and then we move further.

I take no time in making a judgement about a word whether it belongs to my language or not. However I may not be able to write more than fifty words in a piece of paper at a stretch. How does this work? I cannot explicitly write or speak fifty words of my language at a time however I take no time in making a decision whether a word belongs to my language or not. This is part of knowledge of language that I have knowledge of all the possible words in my language. And when someone asks me to make a judgement whether the word belongs to my language or not I take no time, that is, my mind



takes no time in scanning the word, through entire possible words and then I make the decision that the word does not belong to my language or for that matter belongs to my language. This is what constitutes knowledge of language. Okay having understood this we move to the next point.

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## Language and 'A Language'

- **Language**
  - Language is a system.
  - It has got underlying rules that we innately know but we do not know that we know them all.
  - This is a species specific ability.
- **A Language**
  - These are examples of what we know.
  - It has got parametric rules.
  - It is what we speak.



To understand little bit more on the question of knowledge of language we come back in a moment when we combine the two parts that we started with today. So just now discussed what we mean by several features of nature of language and what we mean by knowledge of language. Now we will look at language and “A language” distinction . Then we will try to combine together for a total understanding of what we are discussing today. Now we have also discussed about Language Acquisition Device and Universal Grammar. In short, Language Acquisition Device is called LAD.

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## LAD and Universal Grammar

- LAD is a hypothetical device but a **real capacity** which every normal human child is assumed to be born with.
- Universal Grammar requires a trigger (input) from the real world for a child to activate this capacity for language which would enable her to develop it.



It is a hypothetical device but a real capacity and we have also heard and seen that every normal human child is born with this capacity. This capacity has Universal Grammar built in it and that Universal grammar requires triggers. And input from the real world that is our immediate surroundings serves as trigger for universal grammar to be activated. And that activated that input which activates universal grammar helps human mind generate the capacity to enable human mind to develop language. In other words this is what is called in built and biological capacity which enables a child to develop the capacity of language.

Now, this is a very brief understanding of language acquisition device and Universal Grammar can how child will possibly learn. Imagine a picture, where we have human mind, it gets input from one side and we have the output on the other side. When we examine the nature of input and output in details which we will skip here but I would want to mention it for you to take a look at it. When we examine the nature of input, we find that because the input comes from the real world it is completely mixed “fuzzy” and not really designed for learning language. However, when this gets to human mind something unique must be taking place in human mind so that it processes the input and helps develop the capacity internally which eventually and in turn gives us a fully grammatically viable sentence.

A sentence, which is an example of all the possible rules of a language and I will explain this again little later; what I mean by all possible rules because making of a sentence is an ultimate capacity where all the possible rules of language will come and play. A child must learn the possible combinations of sounds to make a word. And then the child also must know what it takes to make a sentence. That is how subjects and predicates are combined. How agreements combines subject and predicate and what the features of agreements are, which will combine nouns and verbs. And n number of rules that will require to make a sentence

All of them gets discovered, figured out while triggering out rules of Universal Grammar which will again contains principles and parameters. So the main point is, we do not know how it works in human mind and therefore it is considered one of the mysteries but something, what we know for sure and what has been established from 1957 onwards, that something unique and special must happen in human mind to get this done. Now once again even simply looking at the nature of input, which is fuzzy and, which comes from the real world, which is mixed with all kinds of things. If the input is fuzzy the output is also fuzzy. Which helps us understand why a child can speak, why the child speaks the way the child speaks. Let us put it this way and then we will see.

So when the children learn to speak they do not learn to speak a language. That is, they don't learn to speak any language English or Hindi, French, German, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam. What they learnt to speak is the language of their immediate surroundings, and if the language of the immediate surroundings given the nature of language is a combination of different varieties and mixed with all varieties and all other languages in the society then the output is also exactly the same. So if the input is multilingual the output is going to be multilingual.

So the multilingual capacity of human children is no mystery, is no miracle. If a human child is hard wired to learn language, the human child is hard wired to demonstrate multilingualism as well. And therefore it must not be also surprising in other words, it must follow from the understanding of language acquisition that language equals to multilinguality. Language can only be explained, defined in terms of multilinguality. And therefore every human child, right from the beginning is multilingual. And to understand this idea which is part of the understanding, part of the acquisition of language what we need to understand is again is simple.

Whenever we say multilingualism what we want ourselves to understand is L1,L2,L3,L4. That does not necessarily have to be the case. Multilinguality is not always L1,L2,L3 as we have discussed. Multilinguality can also be the capacity of humans to navigate and negotiate between internal variations and varieties of one language as well. So from the two perspectives that is the nature of language in the real world that is our society, and how that language from the real world intersects with inbuilt capacity for learning language helps us understand why what we speak must be only Multilinguality. And therefore it is not difficult to conclude language can only be defined in terms of Multilinguality.

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## No body speaks just one language!

- What follows from an understanding of language we have developed so far -
  - ‘A language’ is a myth and not a reality.
  - ‘Some languages are easier to learn than others’ is a myth.
  - ‘Some languages sound better’ is a myth.



A sound understanding a clear understanding of that will not make us wonder when we say “Nobody speaks just one language” .And this will make it clear when we say “Nobody speaks just one language. One language is always a myth”, and by “one language” we mean, the idea of 'A language'. The idea of purity the .. it can only be a myth it cannot be a reality. There is no language which can only be pure and here whenever I say pure it its only in technical sense of understanding of language.

Every language will allow elements from other languages to come into it. Some of them may have been naturalized within the language and some of the elements that have come from other languages may still be in the process of naturalization, where the speakers of the language can identify them as parts of the elements coming from some other language. This is a natural phenomena language and understanding of such a phenomena makes us speak, “Nobody speaks just one language”. This is no provocative statement this only follows from understanding of internal variations of languages. Languages as multilinguality and how people learn language and the role of input that triggers Universal Grammar and which comes from the real world, from the real society helps us understand these things.

Then there are some more myths that some languages are easier to learn and some are difficult. This is just not possible. The human mind figures out the rules of natural language in the same way. And the rules of natural language are similar to the extent they are universal in the language and therefore this can only be a myth. Some languages sound better this is another myth. These understanding of these myths and these things as myths will help us understand what we want to discuss next which is an

understanding about language and dialects.

So before we conclude this part, what we are really saying is nobody speaks just one language and 'A language' is a myth. And to conclude the whole discussion in totality, where we started to discuss two parts: Knowledge of language and a discussion on language and “A language”. We want to simply say, knowledge of language is a specific kind of knowledge its part that specific kind of knowledge makes special purpose cognition. That we know the rules of language but we do not know that we know them. And these rules are the rules of a language and rules of 'A language' could be different. They may vary from language to language and again there is no language which is just one language.

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## Language and 'A Language'

- **Language**

- Language is a system.
- It has got underlying rules that we innately know but we do not know that we know them all.
- This is a species specific ability.

- **A Language**

- These are examples of what we know.
- It has got parametric rules.
- It is what we speak.



And thus we want to understand that language is a system. It has got underlying rules that we innately know but we do not know that we know them all and language is a species specific ability. Where as 'A language' like Hindi, English could be examples of language. And this has got parametric rules and this is what we speak. And again when we evaluate a language we find 'A language' is a myth because every language is going to have many varieties within and every language is going to have a combination of so many other languages. And therefore 'A language' is a myth.

What people will speak is varieties of language. This will help us understand further when we have a discussion on language and dialect with several other myths about language. Thank you.