M.A. English

Part II

Course I

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

BLOCK

I

Conditions and Contexts of Language Learning

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SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

BLOCK I

CONDITIONS AND CONTEXTS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

<u>Contents</u>

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

This introductory course in *Second Language Learning and Teaching,* aims to familiarize you with the current state of knowledge about second language learning and the principles underlying second language teaching.

The course is divided into five blocks. **Block I, *Conditions and Contexts for Language Learning,*** begins the course with a discussion of the nature of language and language learning. It builds on what you have already studied in the MA I course, ***Introduction to Linguistics,*** about the nature of language and goes on to examine what it means to know a language. It explores the concepts of *competence* and *proficiency* and then outlines the different contexts in which second languages are learnt and what learning environments prove beneficial to second language learning.

Blocks II and III, *Learner Factors in Learning a Second Language I* and ***Learner Factors in Learning a Second Language II***, aim to give you an overview of the various learner factors that research has shown to affect success in language learning. Research has focussed, on the one hand, on identifying the general principles which help explain the functioning of the human mind and the language learning ability, and on the other hand, on identifying the characteristics which show the uniqueness of each learner, the ways in which individuals differ. **Block II** will begin with a discussion of what we understand by the term *individual differences*, but will focus primarily on the general principles which explain how languages are learnt and on characteristics which are applicable to all human learning: memory, intelligence and aptitude. **Block III** takes up the role of individual differences in learning outcomes.

Second language learning is affected by two broad sets of factors: *intrinsic* factors and *extrinsic* factors. Intrinsic factors are those which are internal to the learner (within a person). *Intrinsic* factors could be *cognitive* (related to the mind and thinking processes) *affective* (related to the feelings and emotions of the learner) and *psychomotor* (related to behaviour). In this course we shall focus only on the cognitive and affective factors. While **Block II** will look at the cognitive factors, namely memory, aptitude and intelligence, as already mentioned, **Block III** will take up motivation, learning styles and learning strategies. It will also look at other affective factors like self esteem, inhibition, risk taking, willingness to communicate and anxiety, which have been shown to have an effect on language learning.

Block IV*, The Social Dynamics of Learning a Second Language,* looks at the *extrinsic* (external) factors affecting language learning, and, as the title suggests, examines the role of the cultural milieu in which the second language is learnt. The terms *linguistic competence* and *communicative competence* were introduced in **Block I**. This block will revisit the concept of *communicative competence* in order for us to understand how learning a second language is influenced by the way a language operates in a society. The block will then move on to analyse the role of cultural awareness in learning a second language. The discussion will hinge on the question

whether learning a language goes hand in hand with learning the culture associated with the language, and we will go on to explore the dimensions of *cultural competence*.

Block V, *Factors Affecting the Teaching of a Second Language,* moves into the instructional setting. It discusses how, in the Indian context, policy decisions on the inclusion of a particular language or languages in the curriculum are taken at the national or state level, in response to societal demands. These decisions are translated in real terms in the school curriculum. Objectives for every level of instruction determine the syllabus for each. Discussion on the aspects of syllabus and curriculum lead to an understanding of the role of materials and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. The block concludes with a unit on the role of feedback, testing and evaluation in the instructional process. The block tries to tie up the various strands of theoretical principles dealt with in the first four blocks in order to show how a course of language instruction is based on all the concepts related to language and language learning discussed earlier.

As you might have noticed, this course covers a very wide canvas, and consequently cannot provide an in-depth analysis of the topics or issues. Since this is a first level course, our aim is to familiarize you with the area rather than to provide a detailed discussion of issues. We hope, however, that it will motivate you to read further, at a later date, on the areas that are of interest to you.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BLOCK

Language is fundamentally important for the organization and development of human life and civilization. Without language, knowledge would not have been possible for human beings. In the days of globalization, it would be difficult to ignore how a second language is learnt. In fact many people today know more than one language in addition to their own mother tongue, and it would be difficult not to. That is why, during the last few decades there has been a keen interest in language learning especially second language learning, in many fields of intellectual inquiry. Educationists, policy makers, sociologists, psychologists, neurologists who study the functioning of the human brain, as well as philosophers – all of them find the field of language learning quite fascinating.

How is it at all possible to learn a language? How do we acquire knowledge of the structures, functions and social uses of our language/s? Why is it that the process of acquisition of our mother tongue, L1, is effortless but learning another language, L2, is sometimes a difficult and laborious task? Why is it that children can learn many languages easily but for adult learners, learning even one new language might become a daunting task? These are important questions, the answers to which may yield significant insights into the functioning of the human mind. They may also help us formulate a wider perspective on language learning and enable us to formulate more meaningful pedagogical practices in our educational settings.

In this block, ***Conditions and Contexts of Language Learning***, our objective is to acquaint you with some theoretical perceptions of the nature of language, the socio-cultural dimensions of language use, the biological, psychological and social conditions that are essential for language learning and the varied contexts in which language learning and teaching takes place all over the world.

Unit 1 of this block entitled ***What does it mean to know a language***? attempts to acquaint you with the characteristic features of language as a linguistic and communicative system. The various aspects of a speaker's linguistic and communicative knowledge are discussed in terms of grammatical, discourse and sociolinguistic competence. We have also discussed the concept of strategic competence which is quite useful in understanding how second language learners cope with the task of communicating in their second or additional language. Finally, the unit introduces you to the distinction between CALP and BICS, that is the social and academic dimensions of second language use in order to make you understand the task that lies before the second language learner. This unit thus provides you with a basic frame of reference to understand and deal with the challenges of second language learning and teaching.

Unit 2, ***The nature of language learning***, acquaints you with some major psychological views of language learning such as the behaviourist and cognitive perspectives and examines whether language learning is a matter of nature or nurture, that is, whether it is a natural process or a cultural

achievement. It also unfolds the various strategies and processes that language learners employ to learn a language. An interesting point to note in this unit is the similarity between children learning their mother tongue or L1 and adults learning their second language or L2. The unit goes on to emphasize how L2 learning is not just a mechanical process of habit formation but a creative process in which the learner is actively engaged in acquiring the knowledge of the language.

Unit 3, entitled Neurological and Cognitive Explanations for Language Learning continues the discussion on the nature and nurture debate with specific attention to the importance of the **age** factor in language learning. It is believed that children are faster at picking up languages. On the other hand, it is also argued that adults learn languages better because they understand rules cognitively. This unit examines the issue by looking at the arguments proposed by neurologists and cognitive educationists. It attempts to shed light on why children sometimes find language learning easier than adults and also on why adults can perform better than children in certain areas of language. Thus if Unit 2 focused on the similarities between L1 and L2 learning, Unit 3 will expose you to the differences between the two.

Unit 4, entitled *Contexts and Issues in Second Language Learning* presents information on the various contexts of language learning, both natural and formal, in which people learn their second language/s. This unit will help you understand how second language learners and their language learning is affected by many individual, social and cultural factors as well as the instructional setting for second language learning. Since most of the reforms in language pedagogy try to address the issues of classroom pedagogy, this unit will help you understand the complexity of issues in instructional settings. As the attempts to reform teaching of English as a second language address some of these problems, the Block will help you to develop a better understanding of the field. It may also help you to be more sensitive about how you as a teacher can facilitate language learning in your classroom.

This Block lays the foundation for understanding the theoretical and practical, general and individual factors that affect second language learning. It also tries to provide a frame of reference to the many other issues you will study in the following Blocks. We hope you will enjoy reading this Block and that it will help you reflect on your own experience of second language learning as well as critically think about second language learning in general.

Unit 1

What does it mean to know a language?

Contents

Unit 1
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO KNOW A LANGUAGE?

1.0 Introduction

Language emerged in the course of human evolution as a means of communication. Different communities developed their own codes with distinctive systems. But the fact remains that systems of language evolved with similar universal features in different corners of the world. All human beings use language to communicate and are capable of learning one or more languages. They have the inherent ability to learn languages.

In order to understand what it means to know a language, we first need to understand the nature of language itself.
In the first unit of this course, we will examine two broad questions:

What is language? and
What does 'knowing a language' mean?

In the first part of this unit we will examine the nature of language and the distinction between language as a system and language as communication. This will feed into the next section on what 'knowing a language 'means.

By the end of the unit you should be able to

- distinguish between language as a system and language as communication
- identify the characteristic features of language as a system
- identify the characteristics of language as a mode of communication
- list the different aspects of knowing a language

1.1 The characteristic features of language

You will already be familiar with the characteristic features of language discussed in Unit 2 of Block I in the *MA I course Introduction to Linguistics*. To help you recap and remember these features, try out the activity below:

Activity A

Write *down the characteristic features of language reflected in the statements below:*

i. *'Guru', 'Yoga' are English words now.* _____

ii. *One is able to make plans for a trip next year.* _____

iii. *We are able to comment upon the features of language using language.* _____

Discussion

If one looks at a dictionary today, we see thousands of new words being created in the language. For example, since Shakespeare's time, many new English words have been introduced in the language. New scientific inventions, new concepts, new garments, new dishes to eat, new perceptions and new experiences - all of this can be encoded in a language. Some thirty years ago, words like 'skype', 'reboot' or 'google'; 'firewall' existed only in a magical fairy tale, and USB port might have been some harbour where ships came to rest. All of these are either new words and new concepts created in the language or old words imbued with new meanings. It would have confused Shakespeare! Languages create new words, borrow words from another language if there is an interesting concept, and change old words beyond recognition. There is no end to the words that we can create in language. English, as you know, has a total number of 26 sounds but with these sounds, we use millions of words. This is because language is an ***open ended system***. With a limited number of sounds, it can generate infinite meanings.

Language is a system which has the ***ability to talk about things displaced in time and space***. That is why we can have a grandmother describing her marriage which happened sixty years ago to her grandchild.

Language is a system of sounds which combine at various levels of organization in complex ways, such as words – morphemes – phrases – clauses - sentences - paragraphs etc. There are rules for organization at various levels. That is what makes it a ***complex system with many levels of organization***. It is not possible to say I have the longest sentence in the language. Even if I create a sentence with 5000 clauses, you can always add one more clause to it and make it longer.

Language also has the ability to create novel ways of meaning. The words in a language have varied relations with other words. One word suggests a host of other words in our quest for meaning; then those words send us to still more words; they in turn send us to …. there is no end to this. That is why a poem may suggest to us many meanings every time we read it. What is more, you can talk about the poem, a linguistic construct, in language itself. This feature is called *reflexiveness*. You will not find any other communication system with this feature.

Language is a system, the knowledge of which is socially transmitted from generation to generation. That is why languages have a long history. This of course does not mean that a language does not change. It changes, and in many ways too. Each new generation comes up with many words which it has inherited and many it creates for itself. That is why language is a very ***dynamic system***.

Review question I

We have looked at some characteristic features of language. Try to list the other features which we have not discussed, using the following sentences as hints:

i.   Once upon a time, 'nice' meant 'foolish'. Today it means 'good'.
ii. It is possible to be apparently polite but actually be sarcastic; e.g. "How wise you are!"
iii. If tomorrow all the people decide to call a stone 'rose', it will be so.
iv. Mary can comment upon the boss's behavior while cooking.

1.2 Language as a system and language as communication

There have been two dominant views on language: language as a system and language as communication. You will recall from your M.A. I, Course II that language has been described as a system of systems. Sounds combine to form words, words combine to form sentences and sentences combine to form discourse. Linguists arrive at the system of each language by describing how these different parts combine with each other. This is the structural description of language. It is a closed system. The number of structures in a language is finite or limited. It is possible to say everything that may need to be said with the help of these structures.

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Every language has its own inherent structure and different languages can have different structures. Some structures are permissible in some languages while they are not acceptable in others. Two or more languages can have structural similarity. When we know a language, we know the structural possibilities in that language.

At another level, language is a means for communication. Language is described in terms of what language does: in other words, the functions of language. This is the functional description of language.

These two broad views have led to differences in the way we view language. The following table lists the differences between the two viewpoints:

LANGUAGE AS A SYSTEM	LANGUAGE AS COMMUNICATION
Focus on form Accuracy-oriented Isolated, not context-embedded Focus on knowledge about language Language as an end in itself	Focus on Meaning Fluency-oriented Context-embedded Focus on language use Language as a means to an end

This distinction between language as a system and language as communication is useful to help us understand what language is and what knowing a language entails.

The following sections will be based on this basic distinction. We will begin with a discussion on the features of language as a system.

1.2.1 The features of language as a system

The language system is organized at several levels:

a. The phonological level or sounds and their combinations
b. The morphological level comprising word-formation (words and the inflections they can take)
c. The grammatical level dealing with sentence patterns(grammatical structures)
d. The semantic level or how meanings are conveyed

a.   Sound system or phonology

All languages use sounds to express meaning and every language has its own distinctive set of sounds. For instance, the middle sound in the word 'gate' is the vowel /ei/ but my language does not have it. Your lesson in M.A. Course I, Block II on Phonetics will have given you a good idea of the specific sounds that English uses. Find out which sounds in that list your mother tongue does not have.

Sounds combine to form words; each language has its own set of conventions for the combinations and their occurrence in the word initial, medial or final positions. As an example, read the sentence below:

Nguzdn came to drabe me last Clozdriday.

You probably noticed that the words 'Nguzdn', 'Clozdriday' do not sound English because English does not allow sound combinations such as 'Ngu', 'zdn', 'zdr' etc. Native speakers will know which sounds can be combined with which sounds and which sounds are found in which part of words.

English uses word stress and intonation patterns which may not be used by other languages. These also form part of the linguistic competence of English speakers. (You can refer to your Block II on Phonetics for a more detailed discussion of these).

b.   Grammatical or syntactic system

When we talk about grammar we are not talking only of structures but how words behave in a sentence because words also have a grammar of their own. We give below a few aspects of what grammatical knowledge entails.

Class membership of words

In the example discussed above, the speaker knows that the sound combinations 'Ngu' 'zdr' are not possible in English, yet the words 'behave' just like other English words. 'Nguzdn comes before the verb 'came' so it must be a noun and subject and 'drabe' must be a verb as it comes with 'to' and is followed by a pronoun 'me' (as in 'to see me').

Thus new words can be created in a language and used because they behave in the same way as the other words in their class do. New nouns behave as nouns and new adjectives as adjectives.

Distinction between different types of words

The speaker of a language also knows that words in the language are of two types: **content words** (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs), **function words** (prepositions, conjunctions, articles, pronouns). Content words are open-ended but function words are closed sets. That is, one can create as many new content words as possible but it is not possible to create new function words. That is, you cannot create new prepositions or new pronouns.

Word forms and their combinations

Another important characteristic feature of language is the way in which words can be expanded with the help of prefixes and suffixes.

Look at the following examples:

Photo, photograph, photographic, photographically,
Beauty, beautify, beautification
Practice, practical, impractical, practicability, impracticality
Nation, national, international, internationalization

Can you identify the root word and the prefixes and suffixes in the words given above? (You will recall having studied this in your unit on Morphology in Course II) Thus, morphology is another aspect of the language system.

Syntactic structures / grammatical rules

What applies to words also applies to larger constructions.
It is possible for a speaker to expand a structure infinitely. You may be familiar with ***This is the house that Jack built***. Look at how this structure can be expanded further with 'that clauses'. You can add some more clauses to it if you want:

This is the man that thrashed the cow that chased the dog that chased the cat that ate the rat that ate the cheese that lived in the house that Jack built.

This knowledge enables the speaker to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in the language. That is why if I said:

I have decided to grow a long beard and sweep the cobwebs in the room like an imbecile philosopher.

you will be able to understand the sentence though you may not have heard it before.

Structures and their meanings

Two sentences can have the same meaning even if their structures are different. Look at the sentences below:

i. The Police diverted the traffic.
ii. The traffic was diverted by the police.

These are, as you may have rightly guessed, in active and passive voice, and though the structures are different, they have almost the same meaning.

What can you say about the sentences below?
iii. Time flies like an arrow.
iv. Fruit flies like a banana.

Here at the surface the two sentences seem to have the same structure, but if you look closely, in iii) **flies** is used as a verb and **like** is a preposition (meaning 'Time goes as fast as an arrow'), while in iv) **flies** is a noun and **like** is a verb (meaning 'Fruit flies,a type of fly, like to attack bananas.)

Similarly, the speaker also has the ability to understand a structure as having more than one meaning. Look at the following structure:
v. The girl hit the boy with a book.

Here the structure may mean either that the girl used a book to hit the boy, or that she hit the boy who had a book.

Knowing a language thus entails knowing a set of grammatical rules with which the speaker can produce and understand an infinite number of sentences. The rules of grammar may be quite abstract and complex but the very fact that a speaker can produce and recognize any number of sentences demonstrates that it is an important aspect of the linguistic competence that a second language learner needs to acquire.

c. Semantic system

So far, we have looked at the structural or form-related features. But language is also used to convey meaning, intentions and purposes. We will now examine meaning-related aspects.

Sense relations

Words have relations with the meaning of other words. For instance, look at the following sets of words and try to identify the relationship among the following words on the basis of their meanings. Two or more words could have similar meaning (synonyms), or have the opposite meaning (antonyms) or fall under a category (hyponyms). For example:

a. wrong-incorrect, courageous-brave, honesty-integrity, affectionate-loving (have similar meaning)

b. holy-unholy, hard-soft, ugly-beautiful, light-heavy, tall-short (have opposite meaning)

c. flowers: jasmine, rose, champak, daffodils, sunflower, zinnia (belong to the category of flowers)

Ambiguity (Multiple Meanings)

Some words, or their combinations, may have more than one meaning. When I say 'I see the bat', it may mean either the nocturnal creature that hangs upside down during the day, or the amazing piece of wood in Sachin Tendulkar's hand. The meaning will depend upon the context of its use.

Let us do an activity to understand how words can be interpreted differently according to the context.

Activity B

How many meanings can you identify for each of the following constructions?

i.   He is a poor teacher.
ii. Take the chair outside.
iii. She took my picture.

Discussion

To understand the meanings of these constructions, it is necessary to apply our knowledge of various grammatical and semantic conventions in English. For instance in sentence (i) the word 'poor' may mean 'financially poor' or 'qualitatively poor'. That is, he does not have money or he does not teach well.

In sentence (ii), the verb 'take' may mean 'carry' or 'occupy'. Sentence (iii) also uses the verb 'take'. 'Took' here may mean 'she photographed me' or 'she carried my picture away with her.'

All these are instances of lexical ambiguity.

To sum up this section on language as a system, we can say that it consists of a set of rules at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. The knowledge of these systems constitutes our linguistic competence. This is the intrinsic, tacit knowledge that underlies our knowledge of any language we know.

When a second language learner is learning a language, s/he has to acquire the knowledge and ability to produce and understand grammatically and semantically well formed sentences.

Review question II

Say why the following sentences are odd and unacceptable in normal English.

i.   The wall ate the sandwich.
ii.   The book in the car read the driver.
iii.   Jane is intelligenter than Mary.

1.2.2 Language as Communication

Language, as we have already mentioned, is also a tool for conveying meaning. Canale lists the following criteria to define communication:
- it is a form of social interaction
- it has a high degree of unpredictability and creativity
- it takes place in discourse and sociocultural contexts
- it is carried out under psychological and other conditions such as memory, fatigue or distractions
- it always has a purpose

- it involves authentic material
- it is judged as successful or not depending on the outcome (for example an utterance like "How to go train?" can be regarded as successful if we are given appropriate directions to go to the station.

Let us see some of the functions that language performs in society. Do this activity in order to be able to understand some of these elements of communication.

Activity C

Say what the speaker is doing in the following sentences:

i.   *"Hello, how are you?"*
ii.   *What a lovely day!*
iii. *Oh it's hot in here!*
iv.   *Are you going to Chennai?*
v.   *This coffee is cold.*
vi.   *Don't touch the stove, it's hot.*

<u>Discussion</u>

Each sentence above performs some action. The first sentence is a form of greeting. This is the **phatic** function of language whereby you maintain social relations; you tell the person that you know him and acknowledge his existence. Imagine what you would feel if no one said 'Hello' to you! It will make you feel very bad and ignored!

The second sentence expresses a personal *emotion* of delight. The third seems to state a fact but it could also be a *polite request* to switch the fan on. The fourth sentence is a *factual inquiry*, it tries to ask for some information. The fifth one seems to be a *statement of fact* but it could also be a complaint in another context. The sixth sentence is a warning: it warns the listener not to do something.

It is possible to perform multiple functions with the same sentences in some specific contexts. For example, the sentence 'This coffee is cold', may be a statement of fact, or when uttered by a hotel guest to complain to the waiter, express his anger and expect him to replace it.

Given that language is a unique system of communication, what are the factors other than grammaticality and semantic

meaningfulness that are involved in it? This is what we will discuss below.

Language use is context-sensitive, that is, we tailor our language according to the situation, the people we are communicating with, our relationship with these people and what we want to achieve through our communication (i.e., our communicative purpose). Let us look at some important factors that influence the appropriateness of our language in certain situations. Here is a small activity that will help you understand what these factors are and how they work in actual communicative situations.

Activity D

Which among the following utterances do you find odd? Why?

i. *Hi dude, how about a cup of tea? (Student to the College Principal)*
ii. *Have you got false teeth? (Clerk to a guest of honour in the University)*
iii. *This chicken needs more salt (You to your hostess who has cooked an elaborate meal for you)*
iv. *How do you do? (First thing in the morning to your mother)*

Discussion

Though these sentences are grammatically correct, they will create problems for one in an actual communicative situation.

i.   A student cannot talk to the principal in such an informal manner, calling him 'dude' because this expression can be used only among intimate friends. The principal, most probably, will throw him out of his office because the student cannot talk to the principal in this manner because the principal is much above him in the hierarchy of roles in the college: he is senior to the student in age, experience and position. He will be considered impertinent and offensive if you speak like that.

ii. A clerk cannot speak in this manner to the guest of honour who has come to the University as an esteemed guest. In the first place it is a highly personal question and the formal situation will not allow any personal questions. Secondly, 'false teeth' is rude and vulgar and social etiquette does not allow us to ask anyone such offensive questions, leave alone a person who is an esteemed guest on a formal occasion in the public domain of the university. It would be an outright insult.

iii. Sentence (iii) is odd because the rules of conduct require one to be polite to one's host/hostess and compliment them on

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their cooking. A comment like the one given would count as rudeness and would offend your host. You can be reasonably sure you won't get another invitation to their house for a meal!

iv. Sentence (iv) has a normal, everyday situation in the house. Your mother will think you are still not completely awake if you say 'How do you do?' to her because this expression is used only when you are introduced to someone for the first time in a formal context, not when you are talking to your mother early in the morning in your own house.

The point is that though all of these expressions are grammatically correct, and semantically meaningful, they are socially inappropriate and therefore unacceptable. It is important for a user to know the conventions of who can say what to whom, where and for what purpose.

We can list the factors that influence our choice of words and also what we say to whom:

i. The *nature of relationship* with the speaker
ii. *Our role/s* while speaking
iii. *Our purpose* of speaking
iv. The *mode of communication*
v. The *topic of conversation* e.g*.,* science, arts, cookery, travel
vi. The *setting* in which the communication is taking place

Let us discuss them in detail. For instance, we change our language depending upon the **nature of our relationship** with the person we may be talking to as we saw in the examples above.

The use of language may depend on the **roles** we have to perform in these conversations. One may be speaking as an expert, a student, as a brother or sister. The language will be have to be appropriate to one's role as a speaker. Only then will s/he acceptable in a group.

The *purpose* of speaking may vary depending on our communicative intent. We have so many reasons why we communicate with the others, such as requesting them for something, inviting them, agreeing or disagreeing with them or sympathizing with them. It would be impossible to list all these because there are innumerable reasons for which we speak with the others.

The *mode* of communication will also affect our language and communication. We may want to invite a guest to our house-

warming orally or through a written card. Our language will change. Similarly, our language changes when we talk to the same person but about different *topics*, The language of a doctor talking to his wife about breakfast and about his recent case of a cancer patient will essentially be different. The *setting* in which the conversation is taking place also changes our language. Your language while discussing an academic topic in class with your teacher will be different from what you talk about with him at a party won't it?

Again, it would be a good idea to go back to Block 4 of your MA I course in *Linguistics* as we are building on the concepts introduced there.

Activity E

*Read the following statements and identify **the setting** (where the conversation might be taking place), **the function** (the purpose for communicating), **the role of the speaker** (who might be communicating with whom), and **the mode of communication** (written or spoken).*

i.   A: Right! I'll take these two T- shirts.
      B: Shall I make the bill?
ii.   A: I would like to book two rooms in your holiday resort.
      B: Could you tell us the dates please?
iii. Mr. Teja, could you get these tests done and come back with your reports.
iv.   It is hereby notified that Plot No. 80 in Maharaja Colony, Pallod, is the sole property of our client Mr. D. Raja.
v.   Admission forms are available at Window No.3 in the Administrative Block.

Discussion

Look at how we can analyse the various factors in the sentences above.

	Setting	Function/Purpose	Role relationship	Mode
i.	Shop	Buying and Selling exchange	Buyer and Seller	Oral-face-to-face
ii	Travel and Tourism Office	Booking accommodation	Traveller and Travel Agent	Oral-telephone

iii	Clinic/hospital	Advising follow-up to diagnosis	Doctor to patient	Oral-face-to face
iv	Newspaper	Notifying	Lawyer to the Public	Written
v	Notice board/web site/ newspaper	Giving information	Institutional authority to prospective students	Written

> **Review question III**
>
> List the knowledge that a speaker must have in order to be a good language user.

So far we have looked at the nature of language and the different dimensions of language. Language is primarily a tool for communication and an effective communicator is one who can use the linguistic system to achieve his/her communicative purpose. We therefore move on to look at what knowing a language entails, i.e., What are the characteristics of an effective communicator?

1.3 Knowing a language: What it entails

As we begin this section, I would like you to reflect on your own profile as a user of language. Some of the questions you would need to consider are:

- How many languages do you know?
- Are you equally good at all the languages you know?
- Do you use all the languages you know for the same purposes?
- Can you read and write in all the languages you know?
- Can you engage in the same kind of communication (e.g., official correspondence) in all the languages you know?
- What languages from the ones you know would you feel competent to present a scholarly paper in? Why would you not be able to do so in the other languages you know?

'Knowing a language' goes beyond simply knowing the linguistic 'rules' of the language and when you know a language there are different levels at which you can operate in the language. While linguistic competence gives you control of language as a system, communicative competence implies the ability to use language effectively to communicate your intentions and to achieve your purpose. The concept of proficiency, on the other hand, makes you

aware of where you are as a language user *vis a vis* other users. Not all users are equally proficient, and each individual user can improve as a language user, or forget some aspect of the languages s/he knows. Proficiency is like a sliding scale which determines your 'control' of each of the languages you know. Lastly, why is it that we don't feel confident to do advanced cognitive functions (involving higher level thought processes) in all the languages we know? Is it another facet of 'knowing' a language? We shall discuss these in this section.

1.3.1 Linguistic Competence

The knowledge of the linguistic system of a language is referred to as linguistic competence.

Noam Chomsky (1965) proposed the concepts of ***linguistic competence*** and ***performance*** while discussing the nature of language. According to Chomsky, c***ompetence*** is the knowledge that is implicitly stored in our brain. Linguistic competence, he proposed, is a part of our genetic makeup: we are all genetically programmed to learn language and the knowledge of the underlying system of our language is there in our LAD (language acquisition device). ***Performance*** is the actualization of this knowledge when we speak and listen or write and read. Performance is explicit and it is affected by our physical or mental state and other external factors. For instance, when you are tired you may not speak very well. Or if there is a lot of noise outside, you may not be able to listen to the TV news well. Performance is always susceptible to outward factors. But our competence is implicit and remains generally unaffected by external factors. (Unless, of course, you are hit by a speeding train and sustain an injury to your head. Then you might lose some or even all of it!) Generally, competence is always there, like files stored on a computer.

Chomsky argued that, since competence is unchanging and stable, it is more useful to look at a person's competence rather than performance. We will now look at the elements that constitute our linguistic competence.

Activity F

Can you identify why the following constructions are odd in English?

i.   I saw a dngzra in the forest.
ii. The table sat on John.

iii. Yesterday he not come.
iv. I like for ice cream.

Discussion

You can see that the word 'dngzra' in (i) is a very un-English word because you do not have words in English which have a consonant cluster like 'dngzr'. One may not know how to pronounce it.

In sentence (ii), there is something wrong because John is a human being and he can do the act of sitting. But how can a table which is an inanimate object 'sit'? It should be *John sat on the table*. John is the subject who does the action of sitting.

In sentence (iii) there is a word missing. In negative sentences, if there is no auxiliary verb, we need to use the supporting verb 'do' in its appropriate form and that is missing. The sentence should be: *Yesterday he didn't come*.

In sentence (iv) there is an extra preposition after 'like' which is not required. One can say *I have a liking for ice cream* or *I like ice cream* but not *I like for ice cream*

In all of these sentences we utilize our knowledge of the sound system, grammar, behaviour of words, conventions about which words are allowed to go together etc. Linguistic competence also entails the ability to identify errors in the sentences and correct them. If someone says: *He come to school every day* the speaker will be able to correct it as *He comes to school every day*.

Linguistic competence then, is the tacit knowledge of how languages (and one's own language in particular) are structured and allows us to make judgements about the well formedness of grammatical structures and other 'rules' about what is a possible sentence in the language.

1.3.2 Communicative Competence

We read above that competence for Chomsky is the intuitive knowledge of how a language works and that this knowledge is in the user's mind and LAD. It has been suggested that though for Chomsky linguistic competence consists of the ability to construct well formed sentences, we all know that language competence extends well beyond the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences. Dell Hymes, in 1972, proposed ***communicative***

competence as a more appropriate way of capturing our ability to communicate through language. Language is a way of making meaning, and meaning lies not in the structure of the sentence but in the context in which the language is used, i.e., in which an utterance is spoken or written. Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence thus got extended to communicative competence, as it was claimed that it gave a more realistic and accurate description of how we use language.

Communicative competence was seen to be the internalized knowledge of both the grammatical rules of language and the rules of appropriate use in different social contexts. Canale and Swain (1980), developed communicative competence to include the following elements:

Grammatical competence
Discourse competence
Sociolinguistic competence
Strategic competence

Let us look at each of these briefly, but before we do so, I would like you to keep in mind that when we use a language we not only have to produce grammatically correct sentences and choose the appropriate words, but we also have to keep the communication flowing: these are the aspects of **accuracy** (correctness/wellformedness) of communication and **fluency** of communication. The four components proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) focus on both these aspects of language use.

Grammatical competence for Canale and Swain is largely the same as Chomsky's **linguistic competence.** It comprises control of the *phonology* of the language (e.g., pronunciation, word stress and intonation) rules of *spelling and punctuation*, *vocabulary* rules(words, compound words like phrasal verbs idioms)*word formation*(inflection, derivation, compounding and agreement) and *sentence formation*. You have already studied all these aspects of language in your MA I Linguistics and should have no problems recalling examples of these.

Discourse Competence goes beyond the sentence into text. It entails one's ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified piece of communication, or 'discourse'. It is the ability to link ideas in discourse either spoken or written into a coherent, unified piece of text. It is knowledge of how cohesion and coherence can be achieved: **coherence** (linking ideas in a text) and **cohesion** (signalling the relationship between these ideas

through discourse markers) are essential to bring out the intended meaning of a text.

Sociolinguistic Competence entails the knowledge and use of *sociocultural rules of use* and *rules of discourse*. *Sociocultural rules* guide us to both understand and produce utterances appropriate to different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual features like the status of the participants, the purpose of interaction, the norms/conventions of interaction in a given speech community or sub culture. Sociocultural rules guide the user not only on how to produce contextually appropriate utterances, but also as to when silence is the preferred mode of communication, i.e., when it is most appropriate to not say anything. You will be able to think of several instances from your own experience where silence is the expected response. Much of our sociolinguistic competence is acquired through the process of growing up in a culture and is therefore part of our nurture rather than a part of our genetic makeup. Communication also depends on the kinds of gestures that accompany what we say, the expressions on our faces and our body language. Often, even these differ from culture to culture and one's sociolinguistic competence enables one to interpret and use appropriate body language in different situations.

It is important to remember that body language may vary across cultures. For instance, in Eskimo culture, head nodding means 'No' and head shaking means 'Yes'. It is exactly opposite in the European countries. Shrugging shoulders, throwing of arms away from the body, raising eyebrows, raising the thumb or pointing downwards with the thumb, closing eyes, pointing with a finger, putting palm to the forehead – all of these are gestures people use while speaking. But though the gestures are the same, they may not mean the same in different cultures. Let us find out which gestures you use to express the following meanings in your culture. Do not use language, think only of gestures:

Activity G

How would you express the following meanings in your culture with gestures?
i.   *Disinterest; "I don't know".*
ii.   *Intense surprise: "No!"*
iii.   *Calling: "Come here".*
iv.   *Anger: "Don't make a noise."*
v.   *Warning; "Remember, I've warned you."*
vi.   *Insulting: "Go away; get lost!"*

Discussion

You must have realized that the gestures for these vary across languages. The knowledge of body language and gestures is part of the native speaker's communicative competence. As you were doing this activity you might have also realized that the different subcultures you are familiar with express these ideas with different gestures and body language

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Rules of Discourse, as we all know, are different for written and spoken discourse. In written discourse, we use different text types, with different rhetorical structures for different functions, e.g., apologizing, complaining, inviting, placing an order, presenting an argument/point of view. We are also familiar with the different conventions in spoken discourse for when to speak and when not to, how to start and end conversations, how to include and exclude people from a conversation, and how to give others a chance to speak (turn taking in spoken discourse). We know how to communicate our intentions to others without explicitly spelling them out: for example when you meet your neighbor and greet him with "Good Morning. Lovely day, isn't it!", your intention is not really to comment on the weather but to convey the fact that you want to be sociable with him. This is what we had earlier described as the phatic function of communication. Each language has a shared set of conventions for conveying different meanings in both written and spoken discourse: the discourse rules of the language which are part of the speaker's sociolinguistic competence.

The last aspect of communicative competence listed by Canale and Swain is *Strategic Competence. Strategic competence* is the type of knowledge a speaker needs to sustain conversation. It involves the use of both verbal and nonverbal strategies to serve two broad purposes: to compensate for breakdowns in communication and to enhance the effectiveness of communication. In the case of a second language speaker, it could be more a means to compensate for inadequacies in language and some of the strategies commonly used by the second language speaker are hesitation, repeating and asking for repetition, guessing words/expressions, circumlocution, paraphrasing and style and register shifting. Strategic competence is particularly useful in the early stages of learning a language where a learner has to fall back on his/her strategic competence and sociolinguistic competence till his/her grammatical and discourse competences develop and catch up!

1.3.3 BICS and CALP

We will now turn our attention to an important distinction made by Jim Cummins between **BICS** and **CALP**. Cummins claims that there are two dimensions to language: the social dimension (BICS) and the academic (CALP) and that these two types of language are acquired differently.

The acronym **BICS** (**B**asic **I**nterpersonal **C**ommunication **S**kills) refers to the language skills needed in social situations. BICS is the day-to-day language needed to interact socially with other people. Children learn it in the playground, in the school bus, while playing sports with other kids, and very importantly today, when talking on the phone with their friends. BICS can be learned fairly quickly because social interactions usually occur in a meaningful social context and such language situations are not very demanding cognitively. Since this kind of language learning happens in a cognitively undemanding environment where the communication is embedded in the social environment, it is acquired fairly quickly and we find children picking up a good amount of conversational skills in a period of two years. The language required is not specialized: BICS is more of conversational fluency and includes control of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.

CALP (**C**ognitive **A**cademic **L**anguage **P**roficiency), on the other hand, is the language proficiency and abstract thought processes required for academic learning. This includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing about subject area content material. The vocabulary is more specialized and complex, as are the language (grammatical) structures. It is acquired in a formal learning environment and requires the cognitive skills of comparing, inferring, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating. In a learning context like school or college it involves cognitive processing and learning to use language for academic purposes. This level of language learning is essential for students to succeed in school. Students need time and support to become proficient in academic areas. Academic language tasks are context reduced, as the information to be acquired is either studied from a textbook or presented in lectures by the teacher As students move up the academic ladder the academic learning becomes more context reduced and the tasks become more demanding. To acquire CALP takes much more time and formal training than it does to acquire BICS. Often people (parents and teachers included) expect a person's well developed BICS to go hand in hand with an equally well developed CALP.

We find that even first language users will all have a fairly well developed BICS, but the level of their CALP depends on their educational level and training. It is quite possible for a native speaker to be a very good communicator without being able to do complex abstract reasoning because his education has not required him to do so.

In the natural order of things, BICS develops first. CALP follows BICS. However, in many second language learning situations, we find that learners need CALP without requiring communicating in the language. Consequently their BICS might not have developed as well as one would expect: you will know of many students who can write good answers but are tongue tied when they have to talk to strangers.

1.4 Describing Language Proficiency

Even though we commonly use the word 'proficient' to describe a person's language ability, it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly constitutes a person's proficiency. This becomes even more apparent when we look at the synonyms for 'proficiency': 'competence,' 'mastery of a skill/behaviour', 'superior performance'. What these suggest is that the concept of proficiency has a great deal of overlap with the concept of 'competence' as discussed earlier, and secondly that proficiency is also related to some kind of judgement, or evaluation of a person's language ability.

While the term 'competence' was used more in academic discussions (Chomsky, Hymes, Canale etc.), 'proficiency' is a term and concept more commonly associated with instructional settings and evaluation of second language ability. The term 'proficiency' can be interpreted from two different perspectives: we can either look at the components of proficiency (the aspects of knowing a language discussed in the previous section: both linguistic competence and communicative ability) or when teaching or testing language ability we talk of establishing 'levels of proficiency', i.e., the different degrees of actual or required mastery of a language from basic to near native levels. The fact that we talk of levels of proficiency underscore the fact that proficiency is equated with an ability which is inherently variable.

In the context of globalization, most people know/need to use more than one language. However, this does not mean that they are equally proficient in the languages they know. A statement of

one's proficiency, either by a certifying body, or a self assessment of ability, enables one to make some kind of assessment of what one can do *with* a particular language (in terms of language control) and *in* the language (in terms of communication). In the emerging context of globalization this often becomes a requirement for both educational and employment purposes. Proficiency in a language is increasingly going hand in hand with cultural sensitivity, i.e., sensitivity to the cultural norms of the users of the other languages one knows. This is associated with 'plurilingualism' which emphasizes the fact that

… as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural context expands, from the language of the home, to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor. (CEFR: p.4)

What the plurilingual approach recognizes is that people who know more than one language (are bilingual or multilingual) use their knowledge of the conventions of the languages they know, their combined linguistic repertoire, to communicate with speakers of other languages when they need to function in contexts where their knowledge of the target language is rather restricted, they bring their entire linguistic competence into play to communicate even in a language in which they are not very proficient.

From this perspective, 'competence' or 'proficiency' cannot be perceived as mastery or control of one language in isolation.

The ***Common European Framework of Reference for Languages***) is a document produced by the European Union which describes in a comprehensive manner
i.)   the competences necessary for communication,
ii.)   the related knowledge and skills and
iii.)   the situations and domains of communication.

It can be seen as a constellation of abilities which would include the following aspects of language use:

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences**, both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences**. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various **conditions** and under various **constraints** to engage in **language activities** involving **processes** to produce and/or receive **texts** in relation to **themes** in specific **domains**, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. (CEFR, p9)

You will be familiar with the dimensions listed here as we have already discussed them in this unit, but we give below what each dimension of proficiency stands for in the *Common European Framework*:

Competences: the sum knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions.

General competence: not specific to language, but required for all actions including language.

Communicative language competences: use of specifically linguistic means.

Context: the events and situations in which communication takes place.

*Language activities***:** use of one's communicative competence for both reception and production in a specific domain.

Domain: the broad sectors in social life in which we function.

Text: any discourse either spoken or written.

Task: any action considered necessary by an individual to achieve a given result/ objective.

The concept of proficiency is especially useful to understand what we can do with language and how well we can do it. It tells us about what tasks we can perform in the language in order to be good users of the language. It is of particular interest to course designers, teachers, and for evaluation of language proficiency.

As we saw above, proficiency can be determined in terms of the skills a person may have at his/her disposal and in terms of how

effectively the user puts these skills to use in a given situation, to achieve a given purpose.

If you go back to your own assessment of your relative proficiency in the languages you know, you will have realized that assessment can be very subjective. How do we know about the proficiency of a person: whether s/he is a proficient user of language or not? If we are going to use assessment of proficiency for decision making in educational and professional contexts, we need a less subjective measure of ability. The CEFR has provided a conceptual grid to describe three *global levels* of proficiency: *Basic User*; *Independent User*; and *Proficient User.* These are further divided into 6 broad levels as given below:

A.   BASIC SPEAKER
    A1 Breakthrough or beginner
    A2 Waystage or elementary
B.   INDEPENDENT SPEAKER
    B1 Threshold or pre-intermediate
    B2 Vantage or intermediate
C.   PROFICIENT SPEAKER
    C1 Effective Operational Proficiency or upper intermediate
    C2 Mastery or advanced

Level	Description
A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.

	Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options .
C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations.

In describing these levels, the following points were kept in mind:

The descriptions should be **context free** in order to accommodate different contexts of language use and should consequently be **context relevant** so as to include all relevant contexts of use. They should have a sound basis in theories of language use and at the same time be couched in terms which are accessible to non specialists: they should be user friendly.

When listing proficiency levels the levels should adequately bring out the progression of ability levels and should be stated in terms which are objectively determined rather than on subjective 'rules of thumb'.

The CEFR describes what a learner is supposed to be able to do in reading, listening, speaking and writing at each level. We have not included all of them here but should you be interested, you could look them up, as the descriptions are available on the internet.

Now go back to your self assessment as a language user and see where you had placed yourself for each language you know and what criteria you were using for your assessment. Would someone else assessing you on your ability to use English, for instance, put you at the same level at which you had placed yourself? Describing one's proficiency requires the use of criteria which can be applied objectively, and which also capture a person's ability *vis a vis* levels reached by other users. Proficiency is conceived of not as a static phenomenon, but as dynamic and subject to change, i.e., one's proficiency in any language can both increase due to exposure and use, and decrease through disuse.

Review question IV

State whether the following sentences are true or false:

i.   All native speakers have the same and fairly developed cognitive academic language proficiency.
ii. All languages make use of gestures to highlight the meanings but they may not be the same.
iii. By the term 'discourse' is meant a coherent and unified piece of text.
iv. A sentence cannot be considered as discourse.

1.5 Summary

We began this first unit in the block (and this course) with a discussion of what it means to know a language. In order to answer that question we needed to clarify for ourselves what the characteristic features of language are. When discussing the characteristics of language we looked at it as a system of systems, as already discussed in your course *Introduction to Linguistics* in MA I. We also went on to look at language as a tool for communication. When we look at language learning and teaching (which is what this course is concerned with) we need to develop in learners not only the control of the linguistic rules but also the ability to use the language to communicate one's intention through language. Knowing a language therefore entails having communicative competence, which is the crux of proficiency in a language.

1.6 References

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1.7 Answers to review questions

Review question I

i.   Language changes a lot over time.
ii.   Expressing multiple meanings with minimum words
iii. Language is socially constructed
iv.   Displacement

Review question II

i.   Wall is inanimate and cannot eat.
ii.   Book cannot be the actor of some action
iii. 'Íntelligent' is a long word with many syllables. It cannot take 'er' as a suffix indicating comparative form.

Review question III

i.   Knowledge about grammaticality and semantic well-formedness
ii.   Conventions about being polite
iii. Conventions about appropriateness as per the role relationship, purpose of communication, setting and subject

Review question IV

i.   False
ii. True
iii. True
iv. False