

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



**A Two Day International Conference on
Emerging Trends in English Language Teaching
(ICETELT 2019)**



Organised by

The Department of English, School of Science and Humanities

Kongu Engineering College (Autonomous)

Perundurai

Volume 7, Issue 8, August 2019

www.ijellh.com

D. Ronald Hadrian

Assistant Professor

Karpagam Academy of Higher Education

Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

ronalddhadian@gmail.com

Linguistic Theory in Practice

Like many of the most difficult questions, the answer to this question may initially seem obvious because language is such a natural part of our lives. But, what is language? If you find you cannot answer this question very well, or if you find you have lots of possible answers to this question then you are one step closer to appreciating the complexity of language. As a language teacher, it is important to be able to explain what language is. Yet language – that which we are trying to teach – is not easily defined.

Language can be characterized in terms of oppositions, a helpful exercise for teasing apart its complexity. One common opposition among researchers in linguistics is to see language as form versus language as function. Language as form is concerned with the structure of the language itself, while language as function is more interested in the work that a language does to facilitate interaction among people. The two views do not have to be seen as incompatible. In some ways they are, in fact, complementary.

First one should understand Linguistic and Metalinguistic. Linguistic knowledge refers to the knowledge of language that we possess, whether we are explicitly aware of it or not. It is the knowledge that develops without explicit instruction from a very young age to allow us to communicate our intentions and thoughts. Metalinguistic knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge that an individual has about the knowledge of language. In other words, it

is explicit awareness of linguistic knowledge. It is also awareness of aspects of language that are part of the culture of a language group.

One type of metalinguistic knowledge closely associated with the language classroom is the set of grammar rules that we can explicitly teach and learn. These can be either descriptive or prescriptive rules. Linguists hold fast to the belief that their task is to describe the grammatical properties of a language in terms of what the speakers of that language actually produce. Their aim is to capture language in terms of the actual habits of its speakers without imposing any preconceived notions of what the language should be like. This type of metalinguistic knowledge is known as descriptive grammar because it captures the patterns and structures of the language that people actually use. From a descriptive grammar point of view, it is better to think in terms of the patterns that language users follow instead of the more value-laden notion of grammar rules, which suggest a list of what one should and should not do.

A descriptive grammar contrasts with a prescriptive grammar, which is what is often found in textbooks used to teach a language. A prescriptive grammar dictates what rules of language should be adhered to, regardless of what the speakers of the language may actually do in natural language production, whether part of so-called standard speech or a dialect. The well-known example of prescriptivism is the admonition that no word should intervene between a verb and the particle *to* in the infinitive form in English. It is unacceptable, in other words, to ever insert an adverb within the infinitive construct, even though English speakers do this routinely in speech and writing. The reason for this prescriptive rule is historical; hundreds of years ago, notions of ‘proper’ English were based on the properties of Latin. In Latin it is impossible to interrupt the verb’s infinitive form because the infinitive is signalled through a suffix on the verb itself; for example, nothing can intervene between the infinitive suffix *-ire* and the root *aud-* in the Latin infinitive form *audire*, ‘to hear’.

The power of tradition is so strong that some prescriptive grammarians still impose this Latinate property on English infinitives. While this is an extreme example, language textbooks often include ‘unnatural’ prescriptive rules, most of which are associated with the most prestigious ‘standard’ forms of English. A second type of metalinguistic knowledge is the knowledge required for literacy. In most alphabets in the world’s languages today, there is an arbitrary relationship between letters and sounds. 4 There is no reason why two lines crossed to form a ‘t’, for example, should correspond to the /t/ sound in English. Yet the association between sound and letters allows us to record language on paper in a visual, two-dimensional format. This association has to be explicitly learned. It is possible for a person to have a fully formed grammar of a language, with a very large vocabulary, without being able to read or write that language. For this reason, reading and writing are not considered ‘natural’ properties of language in the sense that they are not abilities that normally developing children naturally acquire, whether they try to or not.

Instead, literacy-related aspects of language such as spelling, punctuation, writing and reading must be taught and consciously learned. This is the bulk of the hard work of the first few years of schooling. Because of the integral role of reading and writing in education, the ‘unnatural’ nature of literacy can be hard to accept. Yet it is considered a feature of metalinguistic knowledge, not linguistic knowledge, because of the level of conscious awareness that it requires.

So where does this leave us? So far we have considered a range of ways to think about what language is. We can think of language as lying on a continuum from form to function, or make a distinction between internal mental processes and external social interaction. In doing so, we include a full range of academic fields of inquiry. The primary perspective taken in this textbook is an internal, mentalist, so therefore psycholinguistic perspective. The reason for this is not because of any belief that the psycholinguistic view is

somehow better or more important. Instead, it is because most of the literature on language teaching that currently exists assumes a more external, interactionist view of language.

Also important to language teachers is an understanding of pedagogical issues in general; fortunately, there are many texts on general issues of pedagogy. This book, by contrast, is interested in thinking about language teaching from the point of view of the more formal properties of language itself, in hopes that teachers can be more confident about their subject knowledge and thus make more principled decisions when they teach. An expert teacher has their work cut out for them. In addition to general principles of pedagogy, they need to understand the complexity of language. Additionally, they need to be familiar with the process of language development.

. While many perspectives and many answers have been given throughout, hopefully you will hesitate to assume that any one answer is wholly acceptable and applicable for all situations. In fact, in many ways this book raises more questions than it answers. One danger of this is that teachers may feel as though the lack of definitive, agreed answers among researchers means that no one has any answers. Yet hopefully one will instead have developed a deeper understanding of the complexity of language.

Reference

Language Teaching. Cambridge University Press, 1982