

Characteristics of Language

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(i) Language is a medium of communication:

The biggest and the foremost feature of language is that it serves the communicative needs of mankind. We show our feelings, emotions, ideas, and what not with other members of the society through language. As language serves the communicative needs of mankind in general, there are many common universal concepts among different languages of the world due to which it becomes easier to learn other languages. It also promotes inter-cultural interaction.

(ii) Language is symbolic:

Any language works with the help of certain symbols or signs. Through these symbols, the different objects of nature or abstractions of life are identified. For example, the word 'book' is treated as a symbol to convey the ideal associated with it, i.e. a book is something which has many pages with neatly printed pieces of information. Thus each language operates with specific sets of symbols that represent the various things or aspects, concrete or abstract, bound in a specific socio-cultural set-up.

(iii) Language shows Arbitrariness:

It shows arbitrariness in the sense that there is no logical connection between a symbol used and the meaning conveyed through it. That is to say, there is no scientific reason why we call a pen, a pen, not a book. It means that whatever name was given to a particular item of a language by the users of its first generation was decided arbitrarily.

(iv) Language is basically Phonic:

It is the spoken form of language that gets precedence over all other forms. In everyday life the spoken form is the most used form of language. The graphic (written) form may be considered as an offshoot of spoken form that developed in the later phases of human history.

(v) Language is a System of systems:

Any language functions according to certain set of rules. There is a hierarchy of rules which remain operational within the same language. For example, in English language, we have rules for the use of singular, plural, person and different parts of speech.

(vi) Language is non-instinctive:

A child acquires the language that is used in the surrounding in which he/she is brought up. It is not inherited, and so, it is non-instinctive.

(vii) Language is creative, modifiable and elastic:

Language is creative in the sense that with finite sets of rules we can produce infinite number of sentences. The same idea may be expressed in plenty of ways that would have never been used before by anyone.

(viii) Language is primarily human:

Mankind is really gifted with specially designed organs of speech that work to produce distinct sounds. Such distinction of sound is not found in animals. They don't have any organised system of language as we have.