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Aspects of Language

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By: Dharamdeep



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Content

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

Question Paper—June-2024 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—December-2023 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—June-2023 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—December-2022 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—Exam Held in March-2022 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper—Exam Held in August-2021 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—Exam Held in February-2021 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—December, 2019 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper—June, 2019 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—December, 2018 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—June, 2018 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—December, 2017 (Solved)	1
Question Paper—June, 2017 (Solved)	1-2

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
--------------	-----------------------------------	-------------

WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

1. The Nature of Language	1
2. Looking at Data – 1	8
3. Looking at Data – 2	16
4. Language and Thought	23

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

5. History of English Language: An Introduction	29
6. Changes in Sounds and Spelling	46
7. Changes in Vocabulary	54
8. Changes in Grammar	64

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY-I		
9.	The Speech Mechanism	75
10.	The Description and Classification of Consonants and Vowels	78
11.	Phonetic Transcription and Phonology	83
12.	The Consonants of English	92
ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY-II		
13.	The Vowels of English (R.P.)	103
14.	Word Accent, Stress and Rhythm in Connected Speech	112
15.	Intonation	119
ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY		
16.	The Study of Words	123
17.	Word-formation in English-1	132
18.	Word-formation in English-2	137
19.	Word-formation in English-3	143
ENGLISH SYNTAX		
20.	Basic Notions of Syntactic Constituents and Phrase Structure	153
21.	Types of Clauses and Sentences	163
22.	Grammatical Functions, Cases and Thematic Roles	167
23.	The Syntax of Inflectional Elements: Tense and Agreement	171
24.	Pronouns, Reflexives, and Other Bound Elements	173
25.	Syntax of Scope: Adverbs, Quantifiers and Negation	177
LANGUAGE IN USE-1		
26.	Introduction to Sociolinguistics	184
27.	Speech Community and Multilingualism	190

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
28.	Bilingualism	194
29.	Language Standardization	200
LANGUAGE IN USE-2		
30.	Multilingual Use of Codes	204
31.	Language Planning	210
32.	Conversational Analysis	222
33.	Learner Factors in Second Language Acquisition-1	227
34.	Learner Factors in Second Language Acquisition-2	230
THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH		
35.	Variation and Varieties	235
36.	Consolidation and Standardization of English	243
37.	The Spread and Rise of Englishes	249
38.	Indian English	260
STYLISTICS		
39.	Language Variation: The Context of Situation	267
40.	The Connection between Linguistics, Literary Criticism and Stylistics.....	271
41.	Style and Content	274
42.	Analysing Texts-I	280
43.	Analysing Texts-II	299
44.	Analysing Texts-III	309



**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
Sample Question
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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

M.E.G.-4

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any five questions.

Q. 1. Write short notes on the following:

(a) French influence on English language vocabulary.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 51, Q. No. 3.

(b) Change in connotations and associations of meaning.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-19, Page No. 146, 'Change in Connotations'.

(c) Consequences of Bilingualism for the Individual and the Social Group.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-28, Page No. 197, 'Consequences of Bilingualism'.

(d) The Monist view of style.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-41, Page No. 274, 'Style', 'Monism'.

Q. 2. Discuss linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity in terms of language and thought. Do you agree that language determines our thoughts? Support your view with example from any language.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 24, 'Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis'.

Q. 3. Discuss the socio-political contexts that influenced the English language development during the old and middle English periods.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 33, 'Old English' and Page No. 34, 'The Middle English Period'.

Q. 4. What is the difference between words and morphemes? Are they at different levels of hierarchy? How can words be understood phonologically, orthographically, grammatically and lexically?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 125, 'Word vs. Morpheme' and Page No. 123, 'Kinds of Words'.

Q. 5. Why do we need a standard language? What are the stages that a language undergoes in the process of standardization? Is it an advantage when a language is standardized?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-29, Page No. 202, Q. No. 2, Page No. 200 'Introduction', 'The Process of Standardization' and 'Need for Standardization'.

Q. 6. Discuss the importance of language planning and the language problems that necessitate it. Would there be any limitations to language planning in a country like India?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-31, Page No. 210, 'Language Planning: An Introduction', 'Towards Defining Language Planning' and Page No. 219, 'Limitations of Language Planning'.

Q. 7. "Language is considered a heterogeneous and dynamic phenomenon." In light of this statement, discuss language variations and the factors that affect these variations.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-39, Page No. 267, 'Language Variation' and Page No. 270, Q. No. 4.

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QUESTION PAPER

December – 2023

(Solved)

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

M.E.G.-4

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer Question No. 1 which is compulsory and any other **four** questions from Q. Nos. 2 to 7. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Saussure's concept of Linguistic sign.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 23, 'The Linguistic Sign'.

(b) The Syllable and its structure in the English language.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 96, 'The Syllables'.

(c) The Binding Theory.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 173, 'The Binding Theory'.

(d) Importance of Age of the Learner in Second Language Learning.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-33, Page No. 227, 'Age'.

Q. 2. How do you distinguish human language from other animal communication systems? What characteristic features of language make it unique?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 3, 'The Characteristics of Human Language' and Page No. 7, Q. No. 6.

Q. 3. Discuss and illustrate the different processes involved in forming new words in the English language.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 132, 'The Process of Word Formation' and Chapter-18, Page No.

139, 'Conversion (or Zero Derivation) and Compounding'.

Q. 4. Classify and describe the consonant sounds of English based on the place and manner of articulation.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 78, 'Criteria for the Detailed Description and Classification of Consonants', 'Place of Articulation' and Page No. 79, 'Manners of Articulation'.

Q. 5. How do you determine a syntactic constituent in a given sentence? Describe the various tests that can be applied in this case.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-20, Page No. 154, 'The Identification of Syntactic Constituents'.

Q. 6. Discuss code-mixing and code-switching. How are social goals of communication achieved in the process?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-30, Page No. 205, 'Mixing Codes' and Page No. 207, 'Switching Codes'.

Q. 7. Explain the relationship between linguistics and literary criticism. When a text is analyzed linguistically, can it bring out the emotions that characterize it?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-40, Page No. 271, 'Linguistics and Literary Criticism' and Page No. 272, 'Stylistics'.

■ ■

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

The Nature of Language



INTRODUCTION

What is Language? Before we try and understand the answer of this question, let us first understand that why this question is important. Charles F Hockett, an American linguist, declared language to be, “the most valuable single possession of the human race”. No doubt, that ability to use language is one basic distinction between human and other species of animal. The intensity and importance of language can alone be analysed by Humboldt’s statement—man is man through the use of language alone. Life must be extremely difficult, if not impossible, without the use of language, but it is so immersed in our lives that we do not care to think about it. We completely ignore the fact that language plays an extremely important role in the way the world exists today.

Let us try to go deep into the term language and see how it has been defined by various people in different ways.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE

The word ‘language’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘*lingua*’ meaning tongue. The etymology of

the word suggests involvement of tongue. It is somewhat true but not completely. An intense study of language would say that is something more than just the use of tongue. Since language became the object of study by ancient grammarians, it has had many definitions. Let’s have a look on the various ways it has been defined.

“Language is that system by which sounds and meaning are related”.

(V. Fromkin and R. Rodman, *An Introduction to Language*, 1974)

“Language is the most sophisticated and versatile means available to human beings for the communication of meaning.” (Brown, 1984)

“Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.” (Sapir, 1921)

“Language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.” (Hall, 1964)

“A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which the members of society interact in terms of their total culture.” (Trager, 1949)

“Language is a patterned system of arbitrary sound signals, characterised by structure dependence,

2 / NEERAJ : ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

creativity, displacement, duality, and cultural transmission.” (Aitchison, 1987)

“Language is a system of sounds, words, patterns, etc. used by humans to communicate thoughts and feelings.” (Oxford Advance Learners’ Dictionary, 1989)

With all the definitions mentioned above, one thing is clear that language is a medium for expression of feelings, thoughts, desire, emotion, etc. or in other words a system for encoding and decoding information. Now it becomes important for us to know that how and why language originated. It would be interesting to know that there are various different theories that try to explain the origination of language. Let us have a look at some of those.

HOW AND WHY DID LANGUAGE ORIGINATE?

In linguistics, the origin of language is known as glottogony; a technical term derived from the Greek roots of the same word. It refers to the ‘genesis of language’ or better put it as the ‘evolution of language’. So when did the language begin? It is an intriguing question and we may not find a completely satisfying answer to this question. There are many theories that try to explain the origin of language and some of those have traditional amusing names.

The Divine Source Theory: According to this theory the language has been provided to humans by a divine source. As there are different religions the divine source varies across the world. According to Christian belief, God after creating the world created Adam and “whatsoever Adam called every living creature that was the name thereof” (Genesis, 2:19). According to Hindu mythology the language came from goddess Saraswati, wife of Brahma, creator of universe. For Egyptians it came from Thoth, for Babylonians the source was Nabu, and for Muslims it was Allah. The tower of Babel story says: “Because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth (Genesis II: 9). It is an interesting fact that almost every religion in the world has a story to say about the origin of language. Some experiments were also done to justify the existence of this theory, but these attempts proved to be futile.

The Natural Sound Source Theory: This theory believes that the human language evolved from the natural sound we hear or make. There are further divisions in this theory as natural sounds are infinite in

numbers. Thus the two famous theories are “bow-wow theory” and “yo-heave-ho” theory.

“Bow-Wow” Theory: This theory suggests the formation of words by imitating (echoing) natural sounds – also known as onomatopoeia – like bow wow, cawcaw, cuckoo, buzz, hiss, rattle, screech, etc. But it failed to give a logical explanation about the origin of the names of soundless objects – wood, stone – abstract ideas – truth, happiness, after all language is not simply a set of words used to identify an object or a thing, it is more complicated than that. Another argument against this theory says that language also impacts the way we hear and imitate natural sounds, for example, in English a rooster crows ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’; in Hindi ‘kuk-ru-ka-roo’ and in German ‘kikeriki’.

“Yo-Heave-Ho” Theory: According to this theory the language evolved from the sounds made by person involved in physical efforts – grunts, groan, and swear words – indicating that language developed in social context. But again it fails to explain the various other aspects of language development. Apes have grunts and social call, but they did not develop the capacity to speech.

The Pooh-Pooh Theory: The English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) believed that human language developed from instinctive cries that human made to express emotions, such as fear, anger, pleasure, and pain. In 1871, in his book ‘*Descent of Man*’, Darwin first suggested this idea. According to him like human himself, his language evolved from the expression of emotion. For example, a feeling of contempt is expressed by puffing of air out through the nostrils or the mouth and the results are the sounds like “pooh” or “pish”. The critics of Darwin, with disgust, called this theory – the Pooh- pooh theory.

The Ding-Dong Theory: It was the famous linguist Max Muller, a contemporary of Darwin, who proposed the ding-dong theory. According to Muller there is a mysterious correspondence between sounds and meanings. Small, sharp, high things tend to have words with high front vowels in many languages, while big, round, low things tend to have round back vowels! This is often referred to as sound symbolism. According to him, the primitive elements of language were but reflex expression of human being induced by sensory impression. The most primitive words would therefore be phonetic types rung out from the organism of the first man or men when struck with an idea.

So, it might be clear now that it is impossible to trace the origin of language. Another issue that intriguing in nature is how often language was invented. Perhaps it was invented once, by our earliest ancestors — perhaps the first who had whatever genetic and physiological properties needed to make complex sounds and organise them into strings. This is called **monogenesis**. Or perhaps it was invented many times — **polygenesis** — by many people. We can try to reconstruct earlier forms of language, but we can only go so far before cycles of change obliterate any possibility of reconstruction. Many say we can only go back perhaps 10,000 years before the trail goes cold. So, perhaps we will simply never know. But we can always guess the reason for its invention. The language must have evolved due to following reasons:

- (a) For passing through factual information and command, or in other words, information talking.
- (b) For expression of thoughts, emotions and feelings.
- (c) For maintaining social circle on friendly level, also called as 'phatic' communication.
- (d) For aesthetic purpose like poetry.
- (e) For psychological reasons like relieving nervous tension.

To understand language better, let us have a look on its different characteristics.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

It might be difficult to decide what we want to put in the category of language. For example, can we say that an angry barking dog has language? Or when a trained ape tries to imitate signs from human sign language, do we call that language? The communication of dog and ape may have some, but not all, of the characteristics of human language. Let's try and compare human language with animals and find out some interesting similarities and dissimilarities between the two.

Use of Sound Signals: The most obvious characteristic of human language is the use of sounds. But this obvious characteristic is not unique to human being and neither it is very important in human language. It is not unique because it is not only human, but most of the species of animal use sounds as means of communication. And it is not important because there are other means of communication available to human beings, which do not require use of sounds signal, like

use of visual signs as in case of sign language or in case of writing, use of tactile symbols as used in Braille. So this characteristic is not very helpful in the making of human language or to say not very human in nature, as far as language is concerned.

Arbitrariness: A less definable characteristic of human language is its arbitrariness, which takes several forms. There is no necessary connection between the object and the word that represents it. A rose could be called a *sorp* and smell as *sweet*. Different languages indeed call the same object by different names. English rose may indeed be rose in French, but it is *bara* in Japanese and *warda* in Arabic. The connection between objects and words is largely arbitrary. If looked closely, it is not difficult to find that human language is also arbitrary in that, it depends on small set of sounds that do not have meaning in them. The sounds /b/, /a/ and /g/ do not have any meaning separately; the question that what does the /a/ means cannot be answered by explaining what /a/ is. It produces some meaning only when it is combined with the other sounds of English to get /bag/ (bag) or /gab/ (gab). A sound alone has no meaning, but when it combines with other sounds to form a word, it makes sense and has a meaning.

Human languages have the set of words which are open-ended, formed from a strictly limited set of components, whether phonemes, gestures, or letters. The fact that these symbols are themselves meaningless and arbitrary allows them to generate a vast stock of words. Though Roman alphabet vary slightly from one language to another, their 26 letters can encode, not only all the words in the Oxford English Dictionary, say, but all the words in the dictionaries of French, Italian, Malaysian, etc., as well, with a handful of additional symbols. Arbitrariness of the actual phonemes or letters is a highly useful characteristic that gives language its infinite flexibility, unlike the total rigidity of animal systems.

In case of animals the case does not appear to be the same. There seems to be apparently clear relation between the signs used and the message an animal wishes to convey. Animal language in a sense have limited list of words, like those Konrad Lorenz found in crows. In animal communication, a 'word' is an entity of its own. Each of the monkeys' cries has a distinctive meaning, same in the case of 'snake', 'eagle' and so on. They cannot be further divided into small set of meaningless components like phonemes. Animals seem to have a dictionary consisting of a limited number of

4 / NEERAJ : ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

signs. It is interesting to know that in case of animals, language appears to be genetically inbuilt and the possibility of learning a language is minimised. As in case of bees – bee-dancing is used by the bee colonies across the world to provide the information about the source of nectar. And we do understand that there is no means that the bees across the globe would pass on the information about bee-dancing to each other, we must agree that they are born with this.

Learning, however, plays an important role in human language. A child brought up in isolation might not be able to acquire any language and thus would not be able to speak sense. Human beings need enough exposure to language in order to learn it, in other words human language is conditioned by environment. The statement is right, but not completely right. One of the pioneers in the field of psycholinguistics, Noam Chomsky says that certain aspects of linguistic knowledge and ability are the product of a universally innate ability or “language acquisition device” (LAD) that enables each normal child to construct a systematic grammar and generate phrases. This theory makes an interesting claim to account for the fact that children acquire language skills more rapidly than other skills, usually mastering most of the rules by the age of four. Here one thing is worth noticing that a child born in India would not master the rules of French by the age of four, until he is in a society where people prefer to speak French. This further suggests that environment play noticeable role in shaping and molding the innate ability what Chomsky says as ‘LAD’.

Displacement: Displacement is a unique characteristic of human language that discriminates it from animal’s way of communication. Displacement simply refers to the ability to communicate about what is not present. As human language is capable of displacement, man is able to transmit thoughts about things that cannot be directly perceived. It is true that bees can refer to the presence of pollen at a distance and sometimes even around barriers such as mountains. However, the dance of the honey, bee tells the onlooker bees exactly how to travel to reach the pollen source. We can call this procedural displacement, but not referential displacement. Human language uses referential displacement. First, we are able to refer to objects that are not physically present. We can talk about “the camp stove” even when that camp stove is in a camp that is on the other side of the hill. Second, we

can locate objects in positions that we cannot see. We can talk about “the pot on top of the camp stove” which then locates the pot by referring to a position that is determined with reference to an object that we cannot see. Third, we can refer to events that are not currently happening. So we can say that “The water in the pot on top of the camp stove boiled over” and just be referring to something we saw several hours ago. Or we can refer to events that might happen in some possible world of the future when we say “The water in the pot on top of the camp stove might boil over, if we turn up the gas too high.” The honeybee, however, cannot speak about where the best source of pollen was a week ago or where it might be tomorrow.

Creativity: Creativity of human language is again a distinguishing factor from animals. Scientific researches on animals have proved that most of the animals are not able to speak something new. A North American cicada can only pass on four messages and a male grasshopper can pass only six. The same goes for the dolphins, bird and other animals. Human, however, are able to speak whatever they want. There is not any limitation. Human can utter those sounds and words that they have never heard, or perhaps will never hear. Thus we see that creativity has got an important role to play in human language.

Duality or Double Articulation: Double articulation is a fascinating linguistic phenomenon, as it describes that how language has ability to describe anything and everything in world. Duality or double articulation refers to the way in which a stream of language can be divided into units that have meaning in themselves, which further can be divided into meaningless sound units. According to linguist André Martinet, language can be broken down in smaller units in two levels:

First, a sentence can be broken down into minimal meaningful units called morphemes. Minimal meaningful units are usually words, or parts of words. For example, ‘worker’ contains two morphemes: ‘work’ and ‘-er’.

Second, a morpheme can be further divided in minimal phonological units, which have no meaning. Minimal phonological units are called phonemes, and they often correspond to letters in English, but not always. The morpheme ‘letter’ contains 6 letters and only 4 phonemes, because ‘tt’ is pronounced as one t