

# Lecture 2

## LCD 306: Semantics & Pragmatics

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# Outline

- 1 Operationalization
- 2 Language
  - An Evolving Definition
  - Divisible
- 3 Meaning
  - What is “meaning?”

# Table of Contents

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- 2 Language
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# What are we talking about?

- We need to make clear what we are talking about
- Make sure everyone is on the same page and has the same “idea” of what we are talking about
- We need to **OPERATIONALIZE** a few key concepts at the start of the work
- This is a non-trivial task that is frequently disregarded

# Key Concepts in this class

- Language
- Meaning
- Our Framework → Our approach

# Making terms clear

## Operationalization or Neologism

- We have two clear and useful options to make a term or a concept clear, and one that will cause great confusion:
  - Neologism: Make a new term with or without making the “definition” explicit
  - Operationalization: Make explicit the “definition” of a pre-existing term
  - Add another related and slightly different definition

# Operationalization

## ■ Operationalization

- Clearly define a term in a way that can then be tested
- Make a “fuzzy” or “vague” term objective
- Working definitions
- Limits discussion (and by extension) conclusions to only the restricted (but clear) conception of an element

# Operationalization

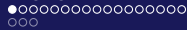
## Example

- For the phrase “Every cook stirred a pot,” an asymmetrical distributive reading is available in addition to the collective and symmetrical distributive readings.
- We can take this conclusion at face-value, or we can exam the assumptions underlying this conclusion
  - Is this reading available for everyone?
  - Is this true of all language?



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# Language

- What is **language**?
  - A bidirectional, discrete, combinatorial, infinitely productive, arbitrary, rule-governed communication system unique to humans which is not bound by time, space or message.



# Whose Language?

- Unclear what exactly what we mean when we say a specific “Language”, such as French.
- Does French mean the language of Luc Bresson, the language of L’Académie Française, what you hear in a bar in the Marais, and/or what you learn in a Queens College French class?
  - Many different ways of thinking of “language”?
  - Q: What do you think is the “right” answer?





# Whose Language?

- For this class we will never be talking about what most people think of as “language.” We will never actually be talking about “French” or “English” as an abstract, sociohistorical construct that is regulated and rarified by the people in power, **even** if that is what we say
- For this class, Language = A COMMUNITY OF MUTUALLY INTELLIGIBLE I-LANGUAGES WHOSE MEMBERS RECIPROCALLY NAME EACH OTHER AS BELONGING TO THE SAME GROUP

# Definition No. 2

- What is **language**?
  - A bidirectional, discrete, combinatorial, infinitely productive, arbitrary, rule-governed communication system unique to humans which is not bound by time, space or message.
  - **A community of mutually intelligible I-languages whose members reciprocally name each other as belonging to the same group**

# What form of language?

- Language is . . .
  - spoken (signed)
  - written
  - read
  - thought up
  - thought about
- What specific form is the object of inquiry in this class (and Chomskian linguistics more broadly)?

# What form of language?

- To help identify what is the specific form, think about what serves as data and evidence
  - Metalinguistic judgments: Grammaticality, Acceptability, Felicity, Naturalness, Goodness, et cetera
  - Reflection
  - Elicitation
  - Behavioral responses (e.g. reaction time, reading time, head turning, eye tracking)
  - Non-behavioral responses (e.g. Neurological, pupilometric)
- Q: What do all of these data have in common?
- NB: *Documentation of extemporaneous, rehearsed or practice language is less frequent but not unheard of*



# What form of language?

- Chomskian linguistics is not generally concerned with what people actually do because ones **performance** is subject to a number of confounding factors
  - Performance errors
  - Processing
  - Attention
  - False starts
  - Extralinguistic external factors (e.g. fatigue, emotional state, chemical use)

# What form of language?

- Focus is almost exclusively on a speaker's knowledge **of** one's language. Not what they think they know, but what they actually know
- Like other cognitive processes or “abilities” one does not expect to find this anywhere in the brain. A system which utilizes a number of other neurological, cognitive, and physical systems.
- Chomskian linguistics considers knowledge of, not about, language which is different from what is produced, termed **competence** as the primary object of inquiry

# Definition No. 3

- What is **language**?
  - A bidirectional, discrete, combinatorial, infinitely productive, arbitrary, rule-governed communication system unique to humans which is not bound by time, space or message.
  - A community of mutually intelligible I-languages whose members reciprocally name each other as belonging to the same group
  - **A speaker's knowledge of this communication system (competence)**

# What kind of speaker?

- Languages cannot exist but for their users
- Who exactly are we talking about when we are talking about a language's users?

# What kind of speaker?

- Number of languages exposed to
  - None: Les enfants sauvages
  - One: Monolingual
  - Two: Bilingual
  - Three or more: Multilingual
- Age of language exposure
  - From birth: Native
  - Childhood or later: Non-native
- Age of user
  - Infancy
  - Toddlerhood
  - Childhood
  - Adulthood
  - Senescence
- Cognitive Ability
  - Aphasia
  - Autism
  - Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

# What kind of speaker?

- Unless otherwise stated, it is assumed that the user of the variety under investigation is. . .
  - Monolingual
  - Native
  - Adult
  - Neurotypical with no history of traumatic brain injury
  - With no hearing or language impairment
  - A non-linguist in experimental linguistics, and a linguist in Chomskian “thought” experiment reflective studies

# Definition No. 4

- What is **language**?
  - A bidirectional, discrete, combinatorial, infinitely productive, arbitrary, rule-governed communication system unique to humans which is not bound by time, space or message.
  - A community of mutually intelligible l-languages whose members reciprocally name each other as belonging to the same group
  - A speaker's knowledge of this communication system (competence)
  - **The knowledge of the system of communication of a neurotypical, native, monolingual, adult non-linguist with no history of traumatic brain injury, hearing, or language impairment**

# Learnability of Language

- How is language learned?
  - Direct instruction
  - Trial and Error
  - Statistical learning & pattern recognition
  - Divine gift
  - Because we are humans
  - Genetics



# Learnability of Language

- Utilize innate processes
  - Domain-general processes?
  - Domain-specific processes?
- NOT *tabula rasa*
- Already have some rules and operations
  - Cognitive primitives
- Ultimately tied to exposure from community members

# Definition No. 5

- What is **language**?
  - A bidirectional, discrete, combinatorial, infinitely productive, arbitrary, rule-governed communication system unique to humans which is not bound by time, space or message.
  - A community of mutually intelligible l-languages whose members reciprocally name each other as belonging to the same group
  - A speaker's knowledge of this communication system (competence)
  - The knowledge of the system of communication of a neurotypical, native, monolingual, adult non-linguist with no history of traumatic brain injury, hearing, or language impairment
  - **Culturally transmitted and learned by making use of innate cognitive abilities**



# Language

- We have now arrived at an operational definition of “language”
  - We have operationalized “language” as...
- We will not look at the system as a whole, but only smaller aspects of it
  - Crucially, this means that we assume that language can be broken up into smaller parts, that it is divisible into discrete units



# Language

- Chomskian Linguistics divides language up into smaller discrete units
  - The physical signal of language
    - **Phonetics**
  - System involved in externalization of language
    - **Phonology**
  - Units of meaning
    - **Morphology**
  - Combinations of units of meaning
    - **Syntax**
  - Meaning itself
    - **Semantics**
  - Meaning of a whole utterance or exchange in context
    - **Pragmatics**
  - Everything else
    - **Paralinguistics**



# Language

## Semantics & Pragmatics

- This class will focus on the levels of language which deal with meaning, and meaning in context
  - Semantics
  - Pragmatics
- But what does it mean when we say something “means” something?

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What is “meaning”?

# What is “meaning”?

- Meaning can be thought of in a number of ways
  - Dictionary definition
    - Often inaccurate
    - Highly prescriptive
    - Conservative
  - Features
    - decomposable into features
    - man = human + male
  - Other ways. . .

What is "meaning?"

# Types of Meaning

- Social Meaning
  - information about the social nature of the speaker or context of utterance
    - social class
    - formality
    - gender
    - geographic location
    - education level
    - sexual orientation
    - race/ethnicity
    - various other subcultures (e.g. goths, work environment, drug culture, D&D)