

PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

FIRST LECTURE

INTRODUCTION

DEFINITION

SCOPE

INTRODUCTION

- Psycholinguistics is the study of the interrelation between linguistic factors and psychological aspects. It looks into certain neurobiological and psychological factors that enable us acquire, use, comprehend and produce language.
- The subject focuses a relation between behavioral and cognitive features of human being. It is the reason why linguists and researchers investigate the psychological processes involved

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- in language comprehension, language production, and first and second language acquisition.
- Psycholinguistics focuses primarily on language acquisition. It aims to provide a fairly universal theory as to how our brain acquires and comprehend language.

DEFINITION

- Psycholinguistics is the study of language in relation to mind. However, a detailed study of the subject reveals that:
- 1) Psycholinguistics is the study of (a) the mental processes that a person uses in producing and understanding language, and (b) how humans learn language.
- Psycholinguistics includes the study of speech perception, the role of memory, concepts and other processes in language use, and how social and psychological factors affect the use of language.

DICTIONARY OF LINGUISTICS (P. 473)

DEF: CONT...

2) Psycholinguistics is a branch of linguistics which deals with linguistic performance, language acquisition, speech production and comprehension.

- This is the area of linguistics that is concerned with linguistic performance---how we use our linguistic competence in speech and sign production and comprehension.

AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS BY VICTORIA FORMKIN AND OTHERS (P. 324)

CONT...

- Hence,
- Psycholinguistics studies mental faculties involved in the perception, production and acquisition of language.
- **Perception:** perception can be taken in two ways:
 - **1)** from the time of birth to a certain period of age a child can only perceive speech sounds spoken around him (He/she can't speak rather listen and cry only). These sounds are preserved in the memory and they provide a good foundation on which one's language can be build in the coming days.
 - **2)** adult can perceive second language items despite the fact that they have already acquired their L1. However, they may not acquire second language they way they have learnt their L1 probably because their language learning capacity has been consumed in acquiring L1.

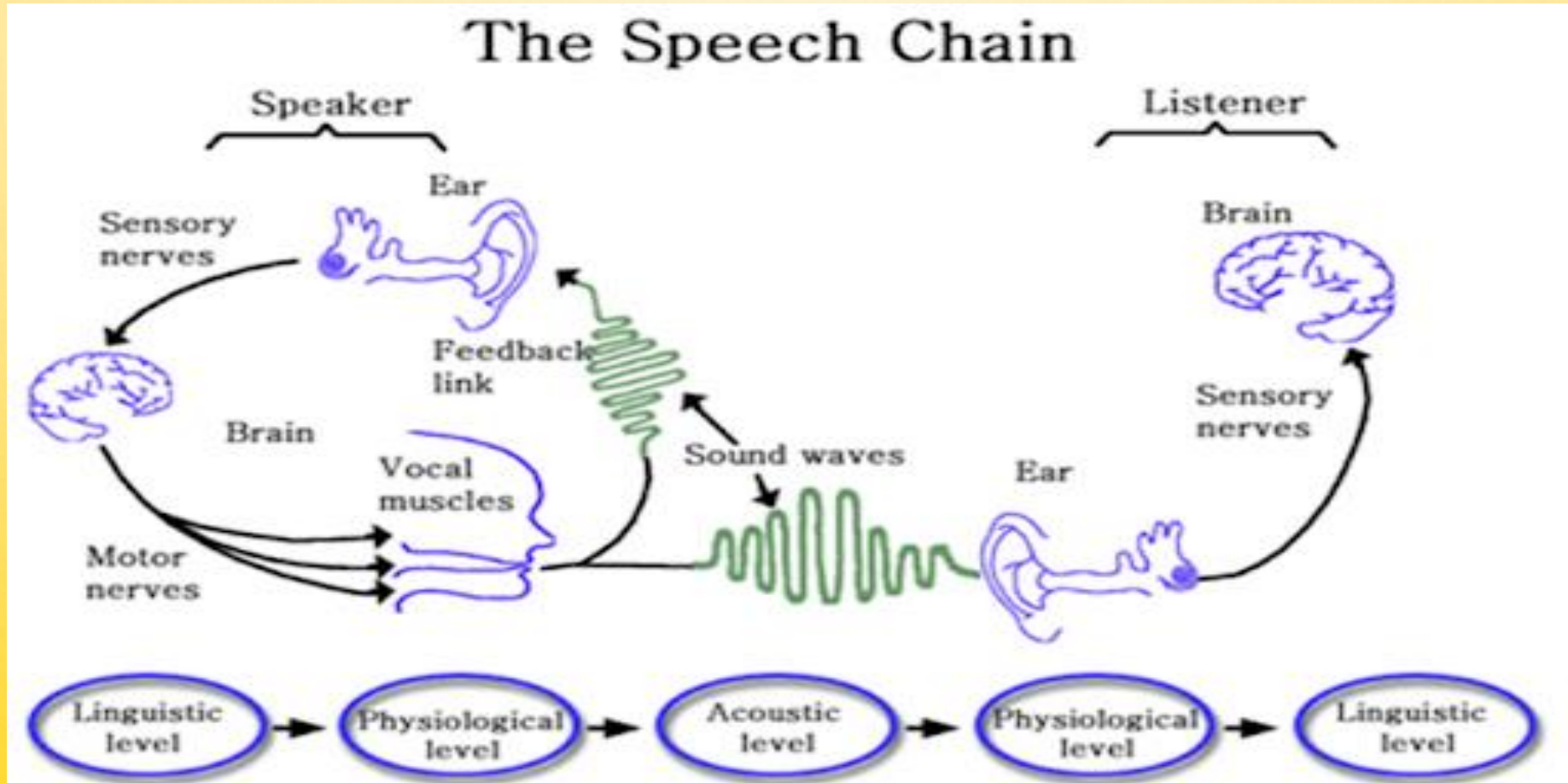
PRODUCTION

- Language production is a psycholinguistic concept which refers to the stages of speech from the initial mental concept to the spoken or written linguistic result be it spoken or written. It is the process of producing Speech sounds to form syllables, words, phrases and sentences. Certainly the idea of what to say and when to say is basically originated in the mind, where memory supports the speaker to have a proper choice of sounds, words, phrases and sentences according to the context.

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- The speaker's prime aim is to convey a theme to the listener/s via grammatical sentences so that communication may properly be processed.
- Speaker, thus, uses motor/vocal organs (sound box, tongue, lips, teeth etc.) to articulate different sounds and his grammatical knowledge supports him construct meaningful sentences according to the context. The process includes respiration, phonation, articulation and resonance.

THE SPEECH CHAIN



CONT...

- Thus, language production refers to the process involved in creating and expressing sense via language. According to Levelt (1989) language production contains four stages: 1) conceptualization, 2) formulation, 3) articulation and 4) self-monitoring.
- Production, in fact, converts nonverbal communication intentions into verbal action.

ACQUISITION:

- Psycholinguistics also looks into the ways how human learn/acquire language. It looks into human psychology, cognitive issues, biological and several other factors. The process of acquisition may be somewhat different in case of L1 and L2. Learner learn their first language in a passive way that starts from the time of birth while they acquire their second language with active efforts depending upon the situation they are exposed to.
- As already stated that the process of acquisition involves certain factors, we need to highlight the following ones:

MEMORY

SOCIAL FACTORS

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

MEMORY

- The role of memory is of prime importance in language learning. A memory is an abstract entity that refers to the power of remembering what has been learnt.
- It functions as a storage in human mind that preserves and stores what is being heard, experienced or encompassed.
- The being learnt, experienced and heard sounds, words, ideas etc. remain a part of our memory. However, with the passage of time some of them may be lost while the other may remain forever depending on their nature and our attachment to them.
- Eg. We remember prayer (parts of Holy Quran) for ever due to our close attachment with our religion.

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- Similarly, we remember the names of our family members, even if they have died years ago, due to our close association with them.
- In contrast, some of the things we learn, listen or observe can't remain in memory forever.
- For example, the names of your class fellows in your early schooling days; some thing you have heard long ago and so on.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Social circumstances influence human language; its acquisition and the choice of language use. Whatever the social system is, it shapes human language accordingly. A child acquires first language from his primary social group (the family members) and then from his neighborhood (the close surrounding) he is living in.

The process of second language acquisition starts the moment a child is exposed to a language other than his native language. Unlike, first language, the process of second language acquisition needs active efforts.

Hence, human learn language spoken around him and communicate in that language keeping in mind the social circumstances in which the communication is to be processed.

FOR EXAMPLE:

WHAT IS THE TOPIC?

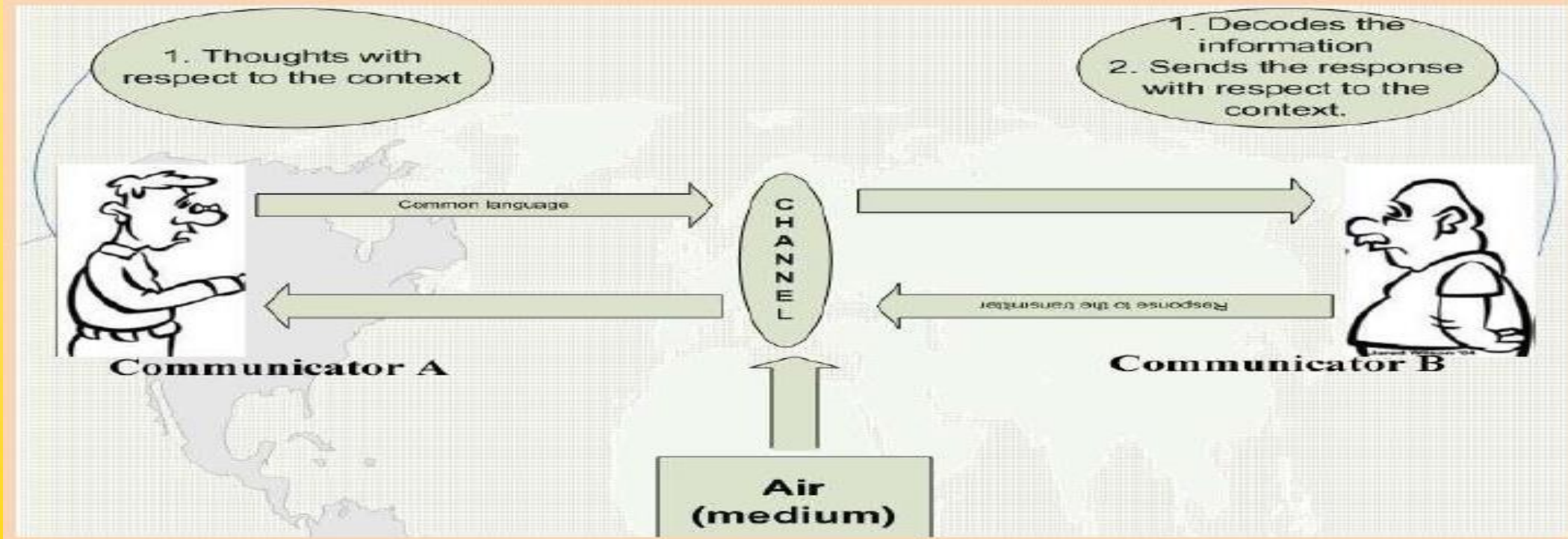
WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

WHAT TO SAY?

WHO ARE THE LISTENERS?

EXAMPLE

Communication system



PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Language learning is not a skill that children either have or don't. There are actually many internal and external factors that influence how fast children pick up a new language—from the child's psyche and cognition to the way they are given linguistic input and motivation on the part of others.

- Certain psychological and neurological factors are involved in the process of human language acquisition, understanding and comprehension.
- Keeping in mind the role of human psychology, cognition and linguistic competence, psycholinguistics is termed as an inter-disciplinary field of study.

Motivation

The process of language acquisition is accelerated when a child is motivated by parents who get pleased at children's initial talks. And they pleasingly provide the desired object which motivates the child keep speaking.

- In case of second language it is seen that exposure is quite important. It also matters how much value parents place in learning an additional language. Parents who prioritize language learning are more likely to push their child to keep trying even when it feels difficult.



THE SCOPE OF PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

- Psycholinguistics is part of the emerging field of study called cognitive science. Cognitive science is an interdisciplinary venture that draws upon the insights of psychologists, linguists, computer scientists, neuroscientists and philosophers to study the mind and mental processes (Stillings et al., 1995)
- Some of the areas that have been studied by cognitive science, include problem solving, memory, imagery and language.

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- The one who is interested in any of these topics must be prepared to cross disciplinary lines for the topics do not belong to any one field of the study but rather they are treated in distinctive and yet complementary ways by various disciplines.
- As the name implies, psycholinguistics is principally an integration of the fields of psychology and linguistics.

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- Linguistics is a branch of knowledge that studies the origin, structure and use of language. Like most interdisciplinary fields, however, psycholinguistics has a rich heritage that includes contributions from diverse intellectual traditions. These contrasting approaches have often led to controversies in how to best think of the study of language processes.

LANGUAGE PROCESS AND LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

- At its heart, psycholinguistic work consists of two questions:
- The first question is:
- **What knowledge of language is needed for us to use language?**
- In a sense, we must know a language to use it, but we are not always fully aware of this knowledge. A distinction may be drawn between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge refers to the knowledge of how to perform various acts, whereas explicit knowledge refers to the knowledge of the processes or mechanisms used in these acts. We sometimes know to do something without knowing how to do it.

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- For instance, a baseball pitcher might know how to throw a baseball 90 miles an hour but might have little or no explicit knowledge of the muscle groups that are involved in this act.
- Similarly, we may distinguish between knowing how to speak and knowing what processes are involved in producing speech.
- Generally speaking, much of our linguistic knowledge is tacit rather than explicit.

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- Linguistic knowledge may be distinguished in certain sub-branches which relate to psycholinguistics in different ways. For example:
- Semantics deals with the meanings of sentence and words.
- Syntax involves the grammatical arrangements of words within sentences.
- Phonology concerns the system of sounds in a language.
- Pragmatics entails the social rules involved in language use. It is not ordinarily productive to ask people explicitly what they know about these aspects of language. We infer linguistic knowledge from observable behavior.

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- The other primary question is:
- **What cognitive processes are involved in the ordinary use of language?**
- By “ordinary use of language” I mean such things as understanding a lecture, reading a book, writing a letter, and holding a conversation while by “cognitive processes” I mean processes such as perception, memory, and thinking. Although we do few things as often or as easily as speaking and listening, we will find that considerable cognitive processing is going on during those activities