



CHAPTER 1

LINGUISTICS: THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE

This chapter includes:

- a brief introduction to linguistics
- modern approaches to understanding grammar
- brief comments on signs, symbols and cultural systems.

This book hopes to establish a healthy respect for the mystery, complexity and beauty of language. It is focused on early childhood because early years practitioners are privileged to be the professionals closest to young children's discoveries and happy inventions in their first language learning. Indeed, early childhood practitioners are well placed, like parents, to appreciate children's language learning, particularly the determination and ingenuity with which they set about tackling the linguistic unknown – sometimes head-on and sometimes by devious routes. One way for all of us to comprehend the sheer scale of young children's linguistic achievements is to attempt a little linguistic learning for ourselves. Other gains include the clearing away of some common misunderstandings about language and the establishment of ground rules for further talking and reading about the nature of language. Furthermore, if we are at ease with some of the main concepts and specialist terminology of linguistics, we are less likely to be misled by dubious claims about language and learning and by questionable childcare and education interventions. So here are some working generalizations about linguistics and modern approaches to grammar.

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Linguistics

The study of language (one simple way of defining linguistics) has probably been pursued in various forms for thousands of years. Humankind has puzzled over the proliferation of many different languages: we might call this the Tower of Babel problem. Earlier generations were fascinated by what we could call the 'roots' issue – when and where did human language originate? People have even speculated about which language God, or the gods, spoke and which language totally isolated and untutored babies would first utter naturally. Clearly, ordinary people as well as philosophers, teachers and linguists have persistently asked, what is language and how does it work?

For centuries the proposed answers to these questions were highly prescriptive, that is, they were cast in the form of rules and assertions about which language was best, the ways in which it ought to be used, and which ideals and models of linguistic perfection should be emulated. It is not surprising that traditional prescriptive linguists frequently promoted the superiority of their own particular form of language use. As we will see later, this tradition of linguistic partiality is deeply rooted in communities and in the attitudes of individuals. For example, it is noticeably difficult for many monolinguals (people who speak only one language) to take seriously other ways of naming, organizing and thinking about the world, apart from their own linguistic practice. Furthermore, any attacks on these language loyalties can lead to passionate and violent reactions, as linguistic conflicts all over the world often demonstrate.

At the personal level, the language of home and early socialization is an intimate part of our sense of self, and any attack on our first language can be insulting, disturbing and alienating. One of the reasons for the huge numbers of bilingual and multilingual speakers in the world is the desire to preserve the languages and the traditions of the home and cultural group, while living and working within another language community.

Saussure and modern linguistics

Modern linguistics originated alongside the other modern social sciences (notably psychology and sociology) in the latter half of the nineteenth century, although it had little impact until the twentieth century. One man, Ferdinand de Saussure, is usually credited as the founding father of linguistics but his ideas were only published in 1915, after his death, as reconstructed lecture notes (Saussure, 1974). Despite this haphazard publication, Saussure's work radically challenged traditional approaches to language studies and outlined a methodology and an analysis of linguistics that remains the basis of modern linguistic science.

Saussure's work proposed a complete rejection of prescriptive judgements and unfounded and fruitless speculations about the origins of language. In their place he suggested a scientific approach to analysing and understanding the nature of human language as it exists and as it is used. In order to clear the ground for this more scientific study of language, Saussure formulated a set of linguistic distinctions, or definitions.¹

What has emerged most clearly from Saussure's radical reshaping of the study of language is a scientific concern to observe languages objectively, to propose theories about their systems and to attempt to reconstruct and describe them accurately. This descriptive linguistics, as it is sometimes called, created new scientific procedures for collecting unknown languages 'in the field', using phonetic systems of notation as well as recordings and photographs. The work also developed a useful technique of relying on the ordinary 'insiders' of a language and culture as linguistic informants.

Saussure's linguistics

- Linguists must clearly distinguish in their studies between the concept of language as the known system of rules of a specific tongue (for example, Welsh or Gujarati), and actual instances of language in daily use – that is, utterances or written examples. Saussure happened to be a French speaker and his original choice of French terminology for these distinctions, *langue* for language system and *parole* for specific usage, are still commonly used by linguists. Any book about grammar or modern linguistics is generally a study of *langue*, but an investigation of the languages and dialects used by inner-city schoolchildren would be predominantly a study of *parole*.
- Any language is a total system – a *structure* of elaborately interrelated elements and relationships. This emphasis on the relationships and the rules that link the elements of a language has led to all approaches since Saussure being broadly defined as '*structural linguistics*'.
- Linguistic studies should distinguish between descriptions of the current state of the language (synchronic language study) and accounts of the historical evolution of a language (diachronic language study). Synchronic approaches with their emphasis on describing how the language is 'now' tend to dominate modern linguistics.

This kind of approach has been taken up by most later researchers and used in the study of child language and language variety. The modern researcher tests the plausibility of any hypothesis about the nature of an utterance or a linguistic form by trying it out on a native speaker. In other words, the ordinary speaker–listener's knowledge of the particular language system they use is the reality against which the professional linguist must test any theories.

In emphasizing the existence of ordinary knowledge of language, linguists simply claim that the native speaker (adult or child) knows one or more language systems at a deeply intuitive level. We know that we 'know' language because we produce it and comprehend it fairly effortlessly and, frequently, under many different circumstances and in a great variety of situations. Furthermore, we self-correct our own minor slips of the tongue, the pen and the keyboard, and confidently reject any ungrammatical forms of our languages that we happen to encounter. Faced with foreign speakers or infants, we strive to make sense of their intended meanings despite errors, misunderstandings and inaccurate pronunciations.

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Psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics

Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics is the shared area of psychology and linguistics, and it studies language as a major expression of human thinking and learning. It is of central interest to early years practitioners and explains how language is first acquired in infancy and how language, thinking and learning are related. Most people are clear that language is for communication with others and that it has an obvious social dimension, but they are often less consciously aware of its personal function in our thinking and self-organization.

Sociolinguistics

Language is, of course, a crucial method of social communication, cultural cohesion and dissemination. It is the tool, the manner and the matter of much of our socialization in infancy. Linguistics cannot ignore the totality of the human settings in which language is shared with others and learnt in interaction with them. Sociolinguistics is the branch of language studies that seeks to explore these complex areas of linguistics and sociology. Language and its social contexts are of major significance in child development and educational studies, particularly because homes, early years group settings and schools are very different contexts in which children learn to use and develop their languages appropriately. Language is a social creation, the voice of a community, but it becomes a highly personal possession for each of us and a way of thinking. We cannot understand language, learning and thinking, unless we keep both the social and the psychological factors in focus.

Applied linguistics

The above comments are an example of 'applied' linguistics: using linguistic findings for practical social activities like education. Pure linguists pursue strictly linguistic ends, such as refining even more detailed and accurate descriptions of language or languages, but there are many other applications of linguistics, apart from the educational.

In the medical sphere, linguistics provides help with the study and treatment of language disorders caused by congenital or accidental brain damage or disease. Language disorder and retardation also occur in children and adults who have a variety of abnormalities in the organs of voice production or have some specific sensory impairment such as degrees of deafness. These complex problems can only be touched on in this book but progress in dealing with them has been enhanced by detailed linguistic knowledge of non-verbal communication, phonology and verbal thinking.

The application of linguistics has always been associated with the work of anthropologists, who study remote and unknown languages and cultures, but

this approach has in recent decades been adapted to support the long-term and in-depth study of distinctive groups and communities existing within a larger community or society.

Another aspect of applied linguistics is the study of artificial languages and the creation of voices for robots and computers. In the past, ideological and pedagogical theories also promoted artificial languages, such as Esperanto and 'basic' forms of English. The best-known application of linguistics is also the most obvious: the use of linguistic knowledge in the teaching of natural languages to adults and children in a variety of educational institutions.

Summary

- Linguistics is the study of language.
- Modern linguistics is descriptive and scientific in its approach and can be contrasted with traditional approaches that were prescriptive.
- Prescriptive linguistics emphasized notions of correctness and ideals for good language use that were often based on a respect for classical languages and formal written texts.
- Modern linguistic science primarily studies spoken language forms; it describes a language in terms of its structures and relationships. These are the internalized sets of rules that govern its use by native speakers.
- Psycholinguistics is the study of language as it relates to human thinking and learning, particularly the capacity to learn a first natural language in infancy.
- Sociolinguistics is the study of language as it is used and modified by varied social contexts.
- Applied linguistics is the use of language knowledge in practical social settings: educational linguistics is one example, although there are significant applications for linguistics in medicine, information technology, criminology and anthropology.

Grammars

Grammar is not a popular topic with the majority of people, apart from professional linguists and language teachers. This is nothing new and many attempts have been made to sweeten the pill. In the early 1800s the paths of grammar were 'strewed with flowers' (Opie and Opie, 1980: 46) as well as jolly rhymes and exquisitely colourful engravings. In the latter part of the twentieth century there was a steady flow of books, as well as radio and television programmes,

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that assured us that grammar and language study could be funny, fascinating and even sexy! The humorous approach has continued to be surprisingly popular in the current decade (Truss, 2003). These guides are nearly always well researched and linguistically serious, but they have to combat a general fear of grammar by using such devices as cartoons, jokey sentences and glossy formats. Boredom and anxiety are, in fact, reactions to the half-understood prescriptive grammar referred to in the previous section. This traditional grammar may be a largely discredited ideal based on Latin, but it is only fully rejected by linguists and students of linguistics. The identification of learning, high culture and power with grammar and classical languages has deep roots in Britain's history, political life and establishment culture (see Chapter 2).

Modern linguistics describes a rich and complex range of grammars. There are several differing theories about the structure or grammar of human languages, but it is possible to identify two important characteristics they all share.

- The grammars are all descriptive: they set out to describe the complex sets of relations or rules that link the sounds of a language, or its written symbols, with the meanings or messages intended. In attempting to describe a grammar, the linguist behaves like a scientist, or even an early years practitioner, and observes, records and hypothesizes.
- All modern grammars describe far more than the surface of a language – that which is heard or seen in writing. The traditional prescriptive approach placed great emphasis on the surface written form and analysed that into categories derived from Latin. Modern descriptive grammars identify and describe at least three major levels of a language and, thus, they can be said to be richer and more complex models of language than the traditional prescriptive ideal.

Phonology, syntax and semantics

The three major levels of a language that modern grammars describe are,

- phonology
- syntax
- semantics.

Lexis, more commonly referred to as vocabulary, is sometimes added to this list. Lexis refers to all the words in the definitive dictionaries of a written language or the stock of words available to an oral-language community. This does not mean that we all know all the words of our first languages; nor does it follow that measuring or assessing anyone's vocabulary is an easy matter. We all operate an active vocabulary of words we use regularly and confidently, as well as having a passive vocabulary of words and meanings we understand but are not likely to use frequently. This is a sobering and significant thought for practitioners, educators and administrators who talk glibly of assessing a child's vocabulary.

Learning and teaching suggestions

- Write down some of the favourite words used by younger children on boards, large sheets of paper, wall spaces or hard ground surfaces – outside as well as indoors.
- How do dictionaries work and why do we use them? Create flexible loose-leaf dictionaries with index cards or postcards (based on the children's questions and interests).
- Use the spellchecker on a computer word-processing program. How has it been organized and what must you know to be able to use it?

Phonology

Phonology is concerned with the organization and patterning of sounds in a language. It includes such important indicators of meaning as intonation and the use of stress or emphasis. This patterning of sounds and stress occurs in all languages, but the actual patterns vary greatly between languages. Most of us become aware that different languages have very different 'tunes', and it is possible to recognize a language by its sound, pitch and rhythms without identifying, or even being capable of identifying, any of its words. We use this skill on a daily basis to identify questions or statements in shared conversations: the distinctive rising tone of questions and the drop in pitch at the end of a statement are common features of English phonology.

The stressed parts of an utterance may be of considerable significance in early language learning: important words are often stressed particularly in conversations with foreigners, infants and young children. Among the words most likely to be emphasized are nouns, verbs and adjectives, and these powerful language labels emerge frequently and very early in a child's first language learning.

Phonology also describes and charts the possible varieties of speech sounds, for example, the pronunciation differences between speakers of the same language, known as accents. In the social sphere this often ceases to be merely a matter of objective scientific description, and the values, attitudes and prejudices that surround accents are returned to in the next chapter.

One of the most valuable achievements of modern phoneticians has been the gradual evolution of an International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is used throughout the world to write down the sounds of any language and which is particularly useful in transcribing the speech of young children and infants.

The inclusion of phonology as a major element in modern grammars emphasizes the primacy of the spoken forms of language in modern linguistic science. However, it is important that pedagogical ideas about 'phonics' and 'phonetics' are not confused with the study of phonology. Phonetics is closer to being a form of applied linguistics and focuses on the actual production of sounds by the physical vocal system. Knowledge about what the tongue, palate and vocal cords can do to shape the outgoing breath can be used to help second, and subsequent, language learners articulate a new set of sounds. However, we might note here that distorted versions of phonetic knowledge have also been

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applied to the teaching of initial reading for many years. This limited approach can be replaced by carefully researched insights about young children's development of phonological awareness (Chapter 7).

Syntax

Syntax is that level of language concerned with words and the modification of their forms, such as adding '-s' for many plurals and '-ed' for some past tenses of verbs, as well as the organization of words in meaningfully ordered combinations. This is, of course, the area with which traditional prescriptive grammars were concerned, and some modern studies still use the word 'grammar' in a very specific way when referring only to syntax. Traditional views of syntax are still very influential in non-specialist discussion about grammar. However, rash claims that some children have no grammar are meaningless, as a child without grammar would not only be speechless but also incapable of communicating meanings by any other method.

Studies of syntax also highlight the possible variations within the same language that can exist in vocabulary, word order, and ways of indicating tenses, possession, number and so on. These meaningful grammatical varieties of a language are known as dialects and are discussed in the following chapter.

Learning and teaching suggestions

- Share published collections of nonsense verse with the older children and help them create and record their own versions (filmed, electronically recorded, written down, bound into books).
- Let everyone (adults and children) enjoy the almost meaningful nonsense language of verses such as, 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves/Did gyre and gimble in the wabe', or terms like 'Reeling and Writhing' (Carroll, 1872). How does this work? How can we make up our own versions?

Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning in a language and it touches on the most complex issues, even to the extent of bringing linguistics closer to a form of philosophy. At the simplest level, however, it is clear that meaning in language is partly derived from the syntax – the literal meaning of these words in this order: 'I am wearing a pink T-shirt.' On the other hand, an utterance's meaning can be clear in context but its literal meaning very strange. Thus a specific setting (for example, an early years classroom) makes the following extraordinary request perfectly meaningful: 'Would green table line up at the door, please?'

Semantics is also affected by historical changes in human relationships and circumstances, as well as changes in word usage and syntactic patterns. This only becomes obvious when we consider the dramatic changes in word meaning affecting such terms as 'nice', 'mistress', 'gay' or 'ain't'. Indeed, the

chequered histories of these terms are often only known to historical scholars, students of literature and linguists.

There is a tendency for most people of a particular generation to believe that words and phrases have always meant what they currently mean. The complexity of semantics increases when we consider differing cultures and languages, and realize that the world can be classified, labelled and described in many ways. Cultures even divide up the colour spectrum differently and they vary enormously in the ways in which they classify and name food, homes and ideas about time.

Learning and teaching suggestions

- How could we begin to help a space alien understand our language/languages?
- Do you have pets at home or in the early years setting? Do you talk to them? What makes you think that they understand you?
- Read *The BFG* (Dahl, 1982) and work out the language system of the giants. Use it for extending the story or creating a class/group BFG dictionary.

Language and mind

The important point to remember about the complex sets of relationships and rules known as phonology, syntax and semantics is that they are all involved in the modern linguist's approach to describing the grammar of a language. Furthermore, there is one very significant reason for asking early years practitioners to take a general interest in modern grammars: when linguists attempt to describe the grammar of a particular language, or make claims about the basic components of all human languages, they are trying to describe the human mind. Modern linguistics is, in essence, a tentative science of thinking and learning. It is tentative because it is not suggesting that it has any absolute answers.

Chomsky

The boldest claims about language and the nature of the human mind have been made by the American linguist, Noam Chomsky, and, although his work has inspired a considerable body of research, it is still the subject of disagreements and counterclaims. Chomsky's approach is based on his view that some kind of universal grammar is genetically pre-programmed in the human mind. This claim implies that all human languages share some deep underlying similarities and these 'universals' are reflected in the individual's linguistic 'competence' or innate ability to use and understand language. It would be hard to dismiss this claim in the face of the remarkable acquisition of language by all infants in all times and in all cultures and countries. Barring appalling cruelty or massive physical impairment, babies become skilled linguistic communicators in the first two or three years of life, without professional structured teaching.

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Current research, now disseminated in a witty and informal style by Steven Pinker (1994; 2002), supports this innate hypothesis with the bold claim that there is a 'language instinct' in the human species.

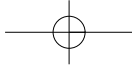
Of course, this innate linguistic disposition, originally described by Chomsky as a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), must be triggered into activity by the child's involvement in a particular social and linguistic world. Chomsky has used the term 'performance' to describe the actual utterances and written manifestations that demonstrate our 'competence' in various languages. As individuals, even as linguists, none of us is able to analyse fully and describe all the rules and structures of our linguistic knowledge, but we use and operate this knowledge effectively and comparatively effortlessly. Indeed, linguists claim that our daily 'performances' are only a very partial reflection of our competence and this holds a salutary warning for carers and educators! It is all too easy to believe that children's linguistic performances in group settings and schools are the sum total of their competence. There is a body of educational research evidence that suggests that the early years group situation rarely taps as much of young children's linguistic competence as a routine day at home with an adult caregiver and siblings (Serpell et al., 2005; Tizard and Hughes, 2002).

Summary

- Language is governed by rules: it is organized, produced and made meaningful by the rules of grammar. A grammar is a set of rules that describe but do not prescribe language.
- Language is creative: we can put together the basic elements of sounds, words, meanings and letter symbols, according to the rules or grammar of the language, and produce an infinite number of original, appropriate and even fantastical utterances and written sentences.
- Modern grammars describe three major levels of language: phonology, syntax and semantics.
- Language is to some extent re-created by every infant, working on the above principles, and in interaction with more experienced language users.

Systems and signs

According to most estimates, there are between 4,000 and 5,000 languages in use in the world – the wide margin of variability reflects the many complicated overlaps between discrete languages and dialects. But this amazing variety of spoken languages should not be allowed to obscure what they have in common. A language is a system for communicating meanings using the human



voice (vocal-auditory tract) and verbal grammatical symbols.

Human verbal language is a systematic and symbolic means of communication and, as such, it shares some similarities with clothes, movement, music, graphic art, flowers and, even, food. All these can be said to communicate symbolically: they convey messages by using varied means and objects that stand for whole ranges of feelings, meanings and values. Consider the possible 'messages' we communicate with a bunch of red roses, wearing an academic gown, or a simple handshake. These are cultural signs only fully understood within particular societies.

Semiotics and signs

What of the many mundane objects and events that communicate – for example, international road signs, traffic lights, musical notation, chess, mathematical signs, fish and chips, football matches and horse racing? They, too, are signs and can be said to communicate messages just as subtly and precisely as the more obvious and well-known systems, such as the signing and touching used by the deaf and the blind. Signing is not merely a compensation for major sensory handicap – visual signing is relied on by people in many occupations. The daily work of auctioneers, television and radio producers, bookmakers, airport runway controllers, dancers and actors is based on elaborate and systematic gestures and body movements. The study of these cultural sign systems is called *semiotics*, or sometimes *semiology*. It studies a vast area of human activities including advertising and food, literature and fashion. Some sign systems are fairly cross-cultural, for example, diagrams, pictures, chemical formulae, mathematical symbols, the movements of chess pieces and musical notation. But other systems, such as gestures, clothes and food, are very specific to a culture and rely on intimate involvement and early socialization. Even in a relatively small area such as Europe, the cultural differences in sign systems can lead to unintentional insults and to misunderstandings about such apparently minor details as facial grimaces, hand gestures and the distance between speakers in face-to-face conversations. These cultural differences, particularly as they concern the systematic patterns for organizing proximity, relationships, food, clothes and pastimes, are the special concern of anthropologists and sociologists.

Learning and teaching suggestions

- Make laminated wordless signs for the outside area and involve all the children in choosing appropriate symbols (for example, for the sandpit; the pond; the digging area; the fruit and vegetable patch; the parking spaces for bikes, trucks and buggies) (Figure 1.1).
- Collect examples of signs and logos to bring into the setting/classrooms (use photographs and include different languages if possible/appropriate).
- Take the children on sign-and-print-hunting walks. Follow up with displays and plenty of talk and language play and experiments (such as creating their own names, signs, logos, notices and banners).

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Figure 1.1 A young boy creates his own marks and signs (3 years)

Unique features?

Linguists study non-verbal systems of communication (sounds, gestures, facial expressions, and so on) in order to clarify the unique characteristics of verbal language. In particular, they analyse the paralinguistic features that accompany the production of all verbal language, as well as the pre-linguistic communications between infants and their caregivers. The characteristics of animal communication systems are also studied in order to clarify the differences between animal and human systems of communication. These differences actually highlight the unique features of human language.

Some unique features of human language

- A highly creative ability to produce, or generate, novel utterances and written sentences.
- The arbitrary or independent nature of words as signals: there is nothing horse-like about the word 'horse' and nothing sweet about the word 'miel'.
- Essentially meaningless 'sounds' are combined to create sets of sounds we recognize as meaningful words.
- Language is transmitted culturally: we have to learn our language in a language community.
- We can communicate about events and things that are remote in time and space, or totally imaginary. We can communicate about the 'not here and not now' – and the never!

Non-verbal communication

Paralinguistics

Human verbal language is also closely linked to another range of communicative systems that exploit subtle and flexible uses of the voice and the body. Paralinguistics is the term for the great variety of phonetic features available to every speaker, features such as intonation, speed and quality of voice tone, and the richly varied characteristics of accents. This system includes a range of noises, such as 'mm', 'uhu' and 'ah' that oil the wheels of conversation and assure speakers that they are being listened to and understood. In fact, these features form a special system known as phatic communication. This has particular importance in sustaining telephone communications: the phatic 'noises' used vary from culture to culture because they reflect the particular ranges of sounds that occur in specific languages.

We all know that the meanings conveyed by a particular utterance can be changed and varied by the skilled use of voice tone, speed and, even, accent switching. Thus a fairly bland statement can be laden with overtones of threat, irony, frivolity, gloom or erotic innuendo. Very few educators and carers need to be reminded of the power and subtlety of the human voice in group or classroom interactions and management. Similarly, most people who care for babies are aware of the great sensitivity with which infants respond to changes in emotional tone and pitch in adult voices.

Kinesics

We can also add another support system of non-verbal communicative signals to our use of the linguistic and paralinguistic: the huge range of body 'language'. This idiom is known as kinesics and includes facial expressions and head gestures, the use of the hands and arms when communicating, whole-body movements including walking and sitting, and, of course, subtle judgements about distances between speakers and the rules for touching others. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance for interpreting meanings, moods and responses of our reliance on the body messages we receive from our conversational partners, or large groups and audiences.

Again, early years practitioners are experts at reading the silent language of dropped eye contact, smiles and frowns, head nods, slouched bodies and fidgety hands and feet. However, it is equally certain that infants and children of school age are also experts at reading the kinesic messages given out, quite involuntarily, by their parents, minders and teachers. These systems are very much a matter of culture and, although they exist in all language communities, they vary enormously. The potential for offence is great, and our spontaneous responses may sometimes need a little conscious thought and modification in multicultural communities, group settings and schools.

Clearly, these human non-verbal communication systems have some relevance for early years practitioners and educators because they are major ways of

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conveying messages in group settings and classrooms, from children to adults and from adults to children. But these systems are also of great significance for first language acquisition in infancy. It now seems fairly clear that the paralinguistic and kinesic systems are established in earliest infancy, long before speech. The significant features of this pre-verbal communication in most cultures are the establishment of eye contact as a preliminary to interactive talk and play; the placing of gaps or pauses in the adult's talk so that the child can potentially be drawn in; the use by the adult of rather exaggerated intonation and stress patterns; and the adult use of body tickling, bouncing, bold gestures and rather dramatic facial expressions. The gestures and subtle body movements of their carers are very important factors in babies' successful early language learning.

It is clear that this elaborate use of paralinguistic and kinesic behaviour by an adult partner is natural and unselfconscious and this very heightened use of non-verbal systems is also noticeable in the interactions of professional carers and educators with very young children.

Learning and teaching suggestions

- Families and early years professionals should use helpful and informative gestures in their play and talk with babies.
- Practitioners can teach hearing babies and toddlers (and their families) some useful signs from British Sign Language (BSL) and use them to accompany speech when playing, singing and eating, etc.
- Use role play and drama to explore other ways of communicating without speech. Help older children to think about animal communications, sheep-dog whistles, flags, human signing (BSL, Makaton), touch systems (Braille) and other cultural symbols (Mendhi patterns) and signals (road signs, traffic signals, and so on).

Summary

- Human language is a system for communicating meanings using the vocal-auditory tract and verbal grammatical symbols.
- Language can be compared with other cultural, communicative systems of symbols, such as music, clothes, road signs, mathematics and food.
- The general study of all these cultural systems of signs and symbolic communications is known as semiotics.
- Human language is developed on an earlier foundation of nonverbal signs and communicative strategies: the paralinguistic, involving voice tone, pitch and emphasis, and the kinesic, which includes the whole area of gestures and body language.

 **Key terms**

Grammar: rules governing languages and the study of such rules.

Linguistics: the study or science of language.

Phonology: the study of the organizing and patterning of sounds in languages.

Psycholinguistics: the study of the role of language in thinking and learning.

Semantics: the study of meaning in language.

Sociolinguistics: the study of language in use in all possible social contexts.

Syntax: the organization of words into meaningful combinations and the small changes made to words to indicate, for example, plurals and tenses.

 **Further reading**

Aitchison, J. (2000) *The Seeds of Speech: Language Origin and Evolution*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. (2005) *How Language Works*. London: Penguin Books.

Pinker, S. (1994) *The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind*. Harmondsworth: Allen Lane/Penguin.

Pinker, S. (2007) *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. London: Penguin Books.

Note

- 1 For part of this summary, I have drawn on Jonathan Culler's introduction to Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (Saussure, 1974).