

CHAPTER 15: COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

Major Points of Review

This chapter deals with communication. Humans, for the most part, communicate with language. Other animal species also communicate in various ways. While human language is completely symbolic so are some other primates to a much lesser extent. More importantly our system of language is open, in other words, it allows for new utterances to be created by combining sound using complex rules of grammar and syntax to produce an infinite array of meaning. Closed language systems do not allow this.

The authors discuss the origins of human language. They point out one idea that vocal language is no older than our species because of anatomical difference with our earlier ancestors. Another point of view is that having an open communication system would be a favorable adaptation to an ever-changing environment. A language acquisition device in the brain is even hypothesized. This device would force the learning of language by all humans, rather than the inheritance of a set of calls, although this theory has yet to be proven. Studies of the many languages of humans by anthropologists do indicate that there are no primitive languages. All human societies have equally complex systems of language. All languages possess the amount of vocabulary their speakers need, and all languages expand in response to cultural changes. The author also discusses the formation, use, and commonality of Creole languages.

The study of structural (descriptive) linguistics is an important part of this chapter. Anthropological linguists have devised methods of studying any language by examining its structure. In doing so, the linguist tries to discover the rules of phonology (the patterning of sound), and morphology (the patterning of sound sequences and words), and syntax (the patterning of phrases and sentences) that predict how most speakers of a language will talk.

One of the basic ideas about the relationship between language and culture are presented in the text is the cultural influence on language best seen in the vocabulary (lexical context) of the society.

Sociolinguistics is the last topic covered in this chapter. Sociolinguistics is the study of the variation in the way people of a society speak. What one speaks about in various situations, and how we speak to various individuals depending upon social status is a great concern to sociolinguists.

Over 

ANTHROPOLOGY
Chapter 15 - Review

Name: _____

Terms:

Pidgin

Creole language

Lexical content

Lexicon

Core vocabulary

Codeswitching

Morph

Morpheme

Morphology

Phonemes

Phones

Phonology

Syntax

Check your Understanding (think about the following):

- 1) How is body movement used in animal communication?
- 2) What are the stages of the acquisition of language by children? Why do children all over the world tend to progress to the same stages at the same age?
- 3) What is a pidgin? What is a Creole? What is Dick Bickerton's argument based on Creole Languages?
- 4) In what way is a language's vocabulary affected by culture?
- 5) What are some of the ways people's use of language varies according to situation?