

The challenges faced by international institutions when employees communicate in different languages

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Language is a system that consists of the development, acquisition, maintenance and use of complex systems of communication, particularly the human ability to do so; and a language is any specific example of such a system.

The scientific study of language is called linguistics. Questions concerning the philosophy of language, such as whether words can represent experience, have been debated at least since Gorgias and Plato in ancient Greece. Thinkers such as Rousseau have argued that language originated from emotions while others like Kant have held that it originated from rational and logical thought. 20th-century philosophers such as Wittgenstein argued that philosophy is really the study of language. Major figures in linguistics include Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky..

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The English word language derives ultimately from Proto-Indo-European *dn̥ǵʰwéh₂s "tongue, speech, language" through Latin lingua, "language; tongue", and Old French language.[3] The word is sometimes used to refer to codes, ciphers, and other kinds of artificially constructed communication systems such as formally defined computer languages used for computer programming. Unlike conventional human languages, a formal language in this sense is a system of signs for encoding and decoding information. This article specifically concerns the properties of natural human language as it is studied in the discipline of linguistics.

As an object of linguistic study, "language" has two primary meanings: an abstract concept, and a specific linguistic system, e.g. "French". The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who defined the modern discipline of linguistics, first explicitly formulated the distinction using the French word langage for language as a concept, langue as a specific instance of a language system, and parole for the concrete usage of speech in a particular language.[4]

When speaking of language as a general concept, definitions can be used which stress different aspects of the phenomenon.[5] These definitions also entail different approaches and understandings of language, and they also inform different and often incompatible schools of linguistic theory.[6] Debates about the nature and origin of language go back to the ancient world. Greek philosophers such as Gorgias and Plato debated the relation between words, concepts and reality. Gorgias argued that language could represent neither the objective experience nor human experience, and that communication and truth were therefore impossible. Plato maintained that communication is possible because language represents ideas and concepts that exist independently of, and prior to, language.[7]

During the Enlightenment and its debates about human origins, it became fashionable to speculate about the origin of language. Thinkers such as Rousseau and Herder argued that language had originated in the instinctive expression of emotions, and that it was originally closer to music and poetry than to the logical expression of rational thought. Rationalist philosophers such as Kant and Descartes held the opposite view.