



Department of Spanish Studies, General Linguistics and Literature Theory
University of Alicante

31710 GENERAL LINGUISTICS I

Degree in Catalan Studies – Degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies
Degree in English Studies – Degree in Spanish: Language and Literatures
Degree in French Studies
ECTS credits: 6 (150 hours)
Semester II (Group 4)
Facilitator: Irma M Muñoz Baell
Academic year: 2011-2012

theory sessions

Driving questions: ARE ALL LANGUAGES EQUAL?

READING 2

CRYSTAL, David (1987): “The equality of languages”, in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; p. 6-7.

TBL-A2

TEAM BASED LEARNING ACTIVITY 2

Pair work activity

1. Give your **Reading Assignment 2 (RA2)** to a classmate and complete the **Student Peer Review Activity (SPR-A2)**. Then, discuss your responses to the questions asked with him/her (in particular, those where your responses differ greatly).

 **Today I am going to do the Team Based Learning Activity with:**

2. Working in pairs, answer the questions as stated below.

1. What does the author mean by the phrase ‘We do not know how to quantify language, so as to be able to say whether all languages have the same ‘amounts’ of grammar, phonology, or semantic structure’? How does this idea relate to the equality of languages?



2. Crystal argues that 'All languages meet the social and psychological needs of their speakers, are equally deserving of scientific study, and can provide us with valuable information about human nature and society'. What are your thoughts in relation to this idea?

3. What does the author mean by the phrase 'At present, it is not possible to rate the excellence of languages in linguistic terms'?



4. Using Crystal's text as a guide, do you believe there are primitive languages? Why?

Reread the following text and comment on what you have learned after reading it:

[...] is the idea that there are such things as 'primitive' languages – languages with a simple grammar, a few sounds, and a vocabulary of only a few hundred words, whose speakers have to compensate for their language's deficiencies through gestures. Speakers of 'primitive' languages have often been thought to exist, and there has been a great deal of speculation about where they might live, and what their problems might be [...]. The fact of the matter is that every culture which has been investigated, no matter how 'primitive' it may be in cultural terms, turns out to have a fully developed language, with a complexity comparable to those of the so-called 'civilized' nations. Anthropologically speaking, the human race can be said to have evolved from primitive to civilized states, but there is no sign of language having gone through the same kind of evolution [...]. All languages have a complex grammar: there may be relative simplicity in one respect (e.g. no word-endings), but there seems always to be relative complexity in another (e.g. word-position). People sometimes think of languages such as English as 'having little grammar', because there are few word-endings. But this is once again the unfortunate influence of Latin, which makes us think of complexity in terms of the inflectional system of that language.



FINAL REFLECTIVE QUESTION: WHAT DID WE LEARN THIS WEEK?

**Give an answer, as comprehensive as possible, to the driving question for this week:
Are all languages equal?**