

What is a language?

A very simple definition of a **language** is that it is a system of communication that allows one user to transmit meaning to another user. Human language is primarily expressed through patterns of noise made with the mouth, nose and throat in combination with air from the lungs (the **vocal tract**). By a much later development, language can also be expressed using specially-made marks on stone, wood, bone, skin, paper etc.

What are the levels of language?

When experts called **linguists** talk about language, they often talk about one of the **levels of language** (see the diagram below). The deepest level of language is **semantics**, which is the level of meaning. Human beings express meaning through the **grammar** and **lexicon** of a language. The lexicon of a language is all the words in it, whereas grammar is to do with the way in which words are put together to form sentences. Most readers are able to recognize **words** in English since they are clearly marked in our writing system by spaces being left between them. The same goes for sentences, which typically begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop. In turn, the grammar and lexicon of a language are transmitted to other language-users through speech or through writing.

The levels of language

