

WHAT IS TAGMEMICS? (Continued)

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In the Proceedings of the S.I.L. Consultants Seminar, Ukarumpa 1976 (Workpapers in P.N.G. Languages, No. 20), I tried without much success to capture the essence of tagmemics. Hopefully the present attempt is a little more successful.

A. Basic outlook. *no underline*

The study of

1. /language is basically a social science, not a mathematical science or a physical science (though it builds on physical articulation and uses mathematical organization).
2. Language is a living effective organism, not a precisely calibrated machine, so it is questionable whether mathematical formulas or computers can really capture or duplicate language (though formulas and computers can be very useful up to a point).
3. The best description of a language is that which most accurately and effectively portrays the living language, not necessarily that which is the neatest or most efficient or most elegant description.
4. There is no required notation form in which to describe language. Prose, formulas, trees, IC diagrams, wiring diagrams, flow charts, etc., are all equally valid to the degree that they are describing real language.
5. Hypothetical constructs are accepted as true descriptions of language only to the degree that it is necessary to postulate them in order to describe observable language.*
6. Theories cannot be tightly closed. Despite recent advances our ignorance about language is still vast, and until all the evidence is in we dare not call one set of theoretical concepts Truth or another set Error. The most that we can say is that one description is more complete or accurate than another. Theories should grow as knowledge increases. Thus a theory that is an openable system, leaving room to grow, is better than a closed system theory that must be discarded upon the receipt of new information. Some parts or parameters in language may be more easily closable than others.

B. Basic constructs

1. Language is a form/meaning composite (a hearer transforms form into meaning, and a speaker transforms meaning into form), so phonology

*(That is, unnecessarily deep structures tend to be avoided.)

(form, par excellence) and grammar-semantics (meaning, par excellence) are equally basic components.

2. Language tends to have hierarchical structure, with distinguishable levels, both in phonology and in grammar.
3. Language tends to have isolatable or movable units at each level.
4. Utterances frequently have recursion, level-skipping, and back-looping of levels.
5. Units frequently have clear centers but indistinct or merging borders. And similarly, levels will frequently have clear major patterns, but minor patterns may be on the borderline between levels.
6. The description of a unit is not complete without a description of its form(s), its meaning(s), and its occurrence rules and restrictions.
7. Units may be composed of strings of one or more smaller units.
8. The description of a language should include both the forms into which various meanings can be inserted (structural formulas), and the various forms into which a meaning can be cast (transformation formulas).
9. There are some kinds of structures or functions (prosodies)* which can be found on many or all levels of a hierarchy. These can be described either by levels or by functions (cross-level).

*(Such as negation, time, location, etc.)

FOOTNOTE

¹This summary owes much to various writings of K. L. Pike, R. E. Longacre, R. L. Watson, and others, and to various discussions with Barbara Hollenbach, Donald Frantz, Bruce Watters, Austin Hale, Elmer Wolfenden, George Huttar, and others.