

LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF COMMUNICATION: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Language is essentially a means of communication among the members of a society. The purpose of this paper is to show that a common language is one of the most important features of a community and the ceaseless use of the same language is the most certain proof of the historical continuity of a community of people. The need to communicate triggers both the occurrence and the development of a language and this need arises and becomes stronger and stronger when one has someone else to communicate with, i.e. where there is a society. In terms of linguistics, the study of language is a multidisciplinary endeavour. Communication takes place not only orally, but also in writing. It is this plurality of aspects in studying the same object that makes language a perpetual phenomenon.

KEY-WORDS: *language, communication, social community, common culture*

Language is essentially a means of communication among the members of a society. In the expression of culture, language is a fundamental aspect. It is the tool that conveys traditions and values related to group identity. The purpose of this paper is to show that a common language is one of the most important features of a community and the ceaseless use of the same language is the most certain proof of the historical continuity of a community of people. This function is strongly related to the social nature of a language, whereas there are interdependency and mutual conditionality relations between language occurrence and a society with its inherent culture. We are going to take into account several aspects of language such as speaking and writing while also keeping in mind that the study of language is a multidisciplinary Endeavour. Communication takes place not only orally, but also in writing.

For instance, writing, a relatively recent invention, has a great importance for a language whereby it plays an important role in the preservation of language realities.

Language is basically a system of communication where sound or signs convey objects, actions and ideas. The history of language dates back to many thousands of years. Language is primarily spoken not written. But the development of the writing medium and later the printing system went a long way is the dissipation of knowledge and without which humans would have remained in the dark about the ways of life and the thought processes of their ancestors. Language is the key to human lives. They can eliminate misunderstanding by using it as an instrument to transfer communication among people. Malinowski suggests, language is "the necessary means of communion; it is the one indispensable instrument for creating the ties of the moment without which unified social action is impossible."¹ Language can thus be said to be at the core of humanity.

Language is an extraordinary gift of God. It is part of what makes man fully human. In fact, Aristotle says man is a rational animal and that what sets him apart, what raises him above the animals, is that he has the ability to reason, and it is very clear that he cannot reason without language. "Aristotle was convinced, however, that meaning was no less an integral part of language than the sounds which bear the meaning and that language depends no less on the rational powers of man by which meanings are constructed than on the physiological organs by which sounds are formed."² Language is necessary in order for man to be a rational creature.

In other words language is what made the growth of civilizations possible. The only means of understanding the great minds of the past is by studying the contemporary written documents of the time. Language is a means of forming and storing ideas as reflections of reality and exchanging them in the process of human intercourse. Language is social by nature and thus inseparably connected with people who are its creators and users; it grows and develops together with the development of society. Stalin observes about language, "It arises and develops with the rise and development of a society. It dies when the society dies. Apart from society there is no language."³

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Society acquires self-awareness through the contact and communication between its members. The significance of communication between people equates the significance of language – the most important means of communication. In this respect, language is of crucial importance in the individual development of humans and

this is best mirrored by the development of blind people as opposed to the deaf (we speak, of course, of blindness and deafness at birth).

Research has revealed the fact that the blind develop their intellectual propensities better than the deaf. Although deprived of their sight, they can hear, which enables them to acquire language, by means of which they can “see” better than with their own eyes. The deaf, on the other hand, compelled to silence, hence unable to access language freely, develop more difficultly on an intellectual level and do not attain all the instruments of a complex abstract thinking process. Hence, as a means of communication in a community, “wherever communities of deaf people exist, sign languages have been developed. They share many similarities with spoken languages (sometimes called “oral languages”, which depend primarily on sound), which is why linguists consider both to be natural languages, but there are also some significant differences between signed and spoken languages.[...] Signing is not only used by the deaf, it is also used by people who can hear, but cannot physically speak. While they use space for grammar in a way that spoken languages do not, sign languages show the same linguistic properties and use the same language faculty as do spoken languages.”[1]

As a tool of communication among the members of a society, language is influenced by the very society where it functions. Moreover, being the most significant tool of communication, a particular language which is mastered only by some people (e.g. Latin, Greek, French, English etc.) has often been the determining factor in turning these people into a separate group as a people, a nation or a state. The distinction between peoples and nations mainly traces the geographical distribution in space of the pertaining languages while the linguistic community, i.e. the fact that they all use the same language, is the essentially defining element for economical and political communities.

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world, the human beings had only one and unique language.⁵ Now there are 3 over 5000 languages in the world but on the other hand around 25 languages die every year. According to Jean A Laponce: "When the protections cost of its language does not have any more sufficient compensation in the form of social and psychological earnings, languages disappear".⁶ Nobody really knows how human speech evolved from animal grunts. But it is true that language the distinguishing characteristic of man and not only differentiates him but also makes him superior to other animal species. Influential US linguist Noam Chomsky argued that humans are born with the ability to speak a language. He even went on to say that some very general aspects of grammar are built into every human mind irrespective of nationality. "Chomsky believed that humans acquire language through an instinctive knowledge. He thought that there was deeper meaning to words and that was how people learned them so easily."⁷ Professor Lloyd James on the other hand said that many animals also have the necessary speech organs and had they tried to develop the aptitude to use them like primitive men did, then even they would have developed speech of their own.⁸ Sir G. Elliot Smith has rightly remarked that the discovery of speech marked the beginning of man.⁹ S.Pit Cordor, an eminent British linguist says - "The first way we can approach language is as a phenomenon of the individual person. It is concerned with describing and explaining language as a matter of human behaviour. People speak and write; they also evidently read and understand what they hear. They 4 are not born doing so; they have to acquire these skills. Not everybody seems to develop them to the same degree. People may suffer accidents or disorders which impair their performance. Language is thus seen as a part of human psychology, a particular sort of behaviour, the behaviour which has as its principle function that of communication."¹⁰ Language is a means of conveying ideas to others. This can also to a certain extent be done by the use of gestures and signs. For instance nodding of the head as a substitute for the word 'yes' or shaking the head from side to side instead of saying 'no'. Language is different from signs and gestures because it employs sounds which have meaning for the users as well as the hearers. The sounds of speech are deliberately and intentionally uttered and are therefore to be distinguished from the emotional cries which are mechanically and intentionally uttered under the influence of joy, fear, anger or surprise. There are two aspects of language namely the inner one relating to the meaning one wishes to express, and the outer one relating to the expression of that meaning through the medium of speech. When speaking a language, words are used which serve as outer symbols of the ideas in the minds. The distinction between speech and language is often associated with De Saussure whose work "Cours de Linguistique generale" was published posthumously in 1916. The distinction had been recognized earlier by Puttenham who in his work "The Arts of English Poesie" (1589) wrote -"After a speech is fully fashioned to the common understanding and accepted by consent of a whole 5 country and nation, it is called a language."¹¹ Mario Pei says that language becomes meaningful when understood by others and the entire community decides to accept it. "If the community changes its mind the language symbol changes or loses its

value".¹² If sounds of speech are regarded as the symbols of inner thoughts and ideas, written words can be considered to be the symbols of these sounds. Thus writing becomes the symbol of a symbol. Words are written in such a way as to make them serve as exact symbols of the pronunciation at the time. But the pronunciation of the words of a language keeps changing over time. Spellings usually do not keep pace with the changes in pronunciation. In language the spoken form gains in importance to the written form. In language pronunciation does not follow the written form but the written form in fact follows pronunciation.

In terms of linguistics, which is a fundamentally theoretical science, it is important to discriminate between the act of “speaking” and “language”. Speaking is specific and concrete, it is the linguistic process as such in the act of communication; it is an individual aspect of language. Language, on the contrary, is a general, abstract aspect and a sum of organisation skills and principles; it is the system that governs any concrete act of communication. Linguistics generally pays more attention to language, an utterly social aspect, the one that can act as a means of communication. As far as interdisciplinarity is concerned, it is worth mentioning the fact that logics, psychology or anthropology have their share in the study of language. While diversifying in terms of space (languages, dialects, idioms), or time, language is also dependent on the social characters of speakers (jargon, slang, specialised terminology) and their anthropological affiliation (child or teenager language, men and women language). Sociolinguistics studies social and cultural influences on language behaviour.

Among the most significant aspects are the ones pertaining to dialects and language standards. Sociolinguistic research has documented the existence of dialects in every language. Dialects are usually associated with educational, economic, social and historical circumstances. Linguistically, the word "dialect" is referred to as “a regional or social variety of a language distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, especially a variety of speech differing from the standard literary language or speech pattern of the culture in which it exists” [2] and not to an incorrect way of speaking a language. Although all dialects of a language are linguistically legitimate, only some acquire social authority. In literate, economically developed societies, the dialect spoken by the members with the most formal education and the highest socioeconomic status tends to achieve the greatest social status. Usually, it becomes the standard for that particular culture, used in writing and in education. Standard dialects also offer a tool through which speakers with different linguistic and social backgrounds can communicate with one another. Regional variations may co-exist within the same dialect as long as they abide by specified linguistic rules, mainly grammatical.

Language distinguishes men from the animal world. Because of language we can share ideas, educate them and improve their lives. Language helps the society to keep evolving. Language has allowed for societies to be built not upon strength and physical domination, but on co-operation and the exchange of ideas. Language is

omnipresent throughout human society today. Without language men would have been like apes pointing fingers at what they see. In conclusion, language can be analysed and described under several criteria, coming to the most different results. It is this plurality of aspects in studying the same object that makes language a perpetual phenomenon. Language is an actor that both shapes, and is shaped by the social community in which it plays a significant role.

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