

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF COMMUNICATION

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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.*

Keywords: *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.

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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.

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.

All people subconsciously mirror their cultural backgrounds in day-to-day communication. Language is both a great advocate for communication and an important reflection of one's cultural background. Intracultural "miscommunication often stems from different and conflicting styles of speech and messages. A perfectly normal intonation pattern for a native German speaker may seem angry and aggressive to a foreign listener. Connotations of words, as well as meanings of slang phrases, vary greatly across cultural lines, and a lack of tolerance and understanding of this fact often results in misinterpretations." [3]

There is a close relationship between the language and the culture of a community - they are inextricably related, so that one cannot understand or appreciate the one without a good knowledge of the other. Culture may reflect in body language, customs, superstitions, and even expressions of friendliness. Although all these definitely observe the cultural norms of a particular society, the impact of culture on language use is both deep and thorough. In this context, culture refers to the lifestyle of a community: the way its members behave, their beliefs, their values and, most importantly, the way they communicate. "Every act of language, be it written or spoken, is a statement about the position of its author within the social structure in a given culture" [4]. Language mediates between the individual and the community.

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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