



AN INTENSIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

Language occupies an important place in the lives of human beings. Language is an important medium of expression. Everyday activities of life are sure to come to an end unless language functions as a means of communication. Human beings originally moved about in smaller groups and used a limited number of signals for communication. Perhaps, when different groups came into contact, their needs and activities increased and hence this system of signals became more complex. In the beginning there were only visual signals. But when visibility was not perfect, human beings felt the need for vocal signals. That is how, it may be assumed, communication by oral sounds evolved. Linguistics provides for a rigorous experimentation with the elements or aspects of language that are actually in use by the speech community. The prime focus of the paper is to deal with the origin of language and function of language and linguistics.

KEYWORDS

Communication, speech community, vocal organs, Philology, expression, vocal organs, social activity

INTRODUCTION

Human beings make use of language for the purpose of communication and in modern days it has taken new forms. The communication of

today has taken new shape even. Life is not possible without communication. Hence it is essential and interesting to learn about the origin of a language and its development.

LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

The study of language begins with the idea about language. Language is perhaps the most interesting entity that mankind has ever come across. We use language for communicating our thoughts and feelings with others and the language we use is transmitted from generation to generation without much deliberate effort on our part. Those who have not studied language systematically do use language with much ease and they are never bothered about the complexities of the ways in which the constituent elements of language combine and organize to make meaningful utterances. The study of language in a scientific and systematic way is therefore, significant both in terms of academic and cultural point of view. Language occupies an important place in the lives of human beings. Language is an important medium of expression. Everyday activities of life are sure to come to an end unless language functions as a means of communication. Language is inextricably tied up with the social and cultural evolution of mankind. Language is as familiar to us as the air we breathe.

DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE

Language is one of the means of communication. It is a means of conveying our thoughts, ideas, feelings, and emotions to other people. However, language is not the only means of communication. Signs, gestures and facial expression can also

communicate our thoughts and ideas. Language is different from signs and gestures, because it employs speech sounds. These speech sounds have meaning.

In the words of Noam Chomsky, language is “a set of (finite or infinite) sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements.” Chomsky focuses on the structural features of language. He showed how language can be investigated by analyzing it into its constituent elements.

THE ORIGIN OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

With respect to the origin of language, a large number of theories have been formulated. Some of them are discussed below.

1. The Bow-Vow Theory

This theory is based on the assumption that language originated as a result of human instinct to imitate natural sounds such as that of the cry of an animal or that of the wind blowing. When a child speaks of a dog as “bow-vow”, he is imitating the speech habits of his ancestors in pre-historic time. It is true that there are a few words in any language which exhibit a kind of sound symbolism. Such sounds are called onomatopoeic words. There is a certain onomatopoeic element in all ancient words for snakes, wind, water etc. The same thing can be noticed in words of recent coinage like crow, quack and

chirp. Words like rattle, splash, ripple, thud, buzz, bang, sneeze, puff, babble etc. also exhibit an onomatopoeic element.

2. Ding Dong Theory

This theory was advanced by the German scholar and philologist Max Muller. According to this theory, language has originated in the sense of rhythm innate in man. This theory stresses the rhythmical nature of the universe and the sense of rhythm innate in human beings. This theory is based on man's tendency to imitate not sounds but movements in nature. Every sensory expression that primitive man received from nature must have found expression from vocal sounds or ding-dongs, like the striking of the bell.

3. The Pooh-Pooh Theory

According to this theory, the origin of language is to be traced to the involuntary exclamation of pain, surprise, pleasure or wonder. The upholders of this theory say that language is only a refinement upon our emotional interjections like "ah!", "ha!", "vow!" etc. This theory derives its name from the expression "pooh-pooh" which is often used as an exclamation of contempt or disgust. The expression has come to acquire a definite meaning. The verb "to pooh-pooh" has become accepted in ordinary usage. It is used with the meaning of belittling somebody or something

4. The Gesture Theory

This theory has been advanced by Wilhelm Wundt and Sir Richard Paget. The proponents of this theory believe that every human gesture is followed by movements of tongue, the lips and the jaws. According to Wundt most primitive means of communication among human being was by means of gesture made with hand. The sign language is still employed by us when we have to communicate with a deaf person or with a person whose language is not known to us. We beckon with hand when we want him or her to come to us. Similarly we nod the head in agreement and shake it from side to side when we want to express disagreement. The upholders of this theory argue that a gesture by hand is usually accompanied by a corresponding movement of the vocal organs. Thus in course of time man is supposed to have passed from sign language to spoken language.

Sir Percy Munn in his book *Education its Data and First Principles* points out how in uttering the word "I" and "me", the lips are drawn towards the speaker in the same way as he would point to himself. At the same time, in saying "you" or "thou", the movement of the tongue is towards the person addressed. The same directional differences can be noticed in the utterance of "here" and "there".

5. The Yo-He-Ho Theory

The Yo-He-Ho Theory was propounded by the 19th century scholar Noire. He emphasized that language has been formed from the words uttered by groups of people engaged in joint burdensome labour of some sort. While engaged in some heavy task such as lifting an object or pushing it or cutting a big tree, people make some sort of “yo-he-ho” noise in order to make themselves feel at ease to a certain extent. These sounds are involuntarily made as a result of the sudden release of the air accumulated in the lungs while exerting powerful muscular effort. The yo-he-ho theorists believe that speech sounds originated in this way.

6. The Musical Theory

This theory was propounded by the Swiss linguist Otto Jespersen. According to him language originated in the form of songs, as reactions to emotions, especially love and joy. In spite of all the theories mentioned above, it is impossible to arrive at the truth regarding the origin of language. Though these theories are true to a certain extent, we do not know how exactly language originated, nor can we be sure whether there was an original common language of whether language developed at different places at different periods. In human speech we make use of vocal organs for the articulation of definite

sounds. These sounds, when arranged according to set patterns, form the words of a given language. For example words, like 'crow' employs a certain sequence of sounds, which serve as a symbol for a particular word which in its turn stands for the given object we have in mind at the time of speaking.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPEMENT OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

Scholars who have studied the origin of language say that the art of writing evolved between 3500 and 2900 B.C. The age of language has been put back to at least 6500 B.C. Human beings originally moved about in smaller groups and used a limited number of signals for communication. Perhaps, when different groups came into contact, their needs and activities increased and hence this system of signals became more complex. In the beginning there were only visual signals. But when visibility was not perfect, human beings felt the need for vocal signals. That is how, it may be assumed, communication by oral sounds evolved. There are different opinions about the origin of language. Plato thought that there was a ‘perfect’ language which all human beings were striving to rediscover. Some believe in the Divine Gift theory of language. They hold that human language is the gift of God. According to Socrates, onomatopoeic imitation was the basis for the origin of

language. But it must be remembered that onomatopoeic words differ from language to language. Some others say that man's instinctive response to certain external stimuli was the basis for the origin of language.

LINGUISTICS

Linguistics is defined as the scientific study of language. It is the systematic study of the elements of language and the principles governing their combination and organization. Linguistics provides for a rigorous experimentation with the elements or aspects of language that are actually in use by the speech community. It is based on observation and the data collected thereby from the users of the language, a scientific analysis is made by the investigator and at the end of it he comes out with a satisfactory explanation relating to his field of study. This sort of systematic study of language has rendered the traditional method language study outmoded or unfit for any theorization.

MODERN LINGUISTICS

Linguistics is the systematic study of the elements of language and the principles governing their combination and organization. Philology was the older term used to refer to the study of language. Philology was rather comparative and historical. A comparative study of language focuses on the similarities and differences within a family of related

languages. A historical study analyses the evolution of a family of languages or the changes that occur within a particular language, over a long course of time. This type of study of the changes in language over a span of time is called diachronic study. On the other hand, an analysis of the systematic interrelation of the elements of a single language at a particular time is called synchronic study. A new approach to the study of language began with the experiments and observation made by Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist. He is regarded as the father of modern linguistics. He considered language as a self-sufficient system. His lectures on language were published from student's notes in 1916, three years after his death. These lectures have been translated as Course in General Linguistics. Important contributions to linguistics were also made by American descriptive and structural linguists. Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloom Field were notable among them. A basic text in American linguistics is Bloomfield's 'Language'. Saussure introduced new concepts and procedures in analyzing language. The following are some of the major terms and concepts introduced by him.

SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC APPROACH

Saussure introduced time concept in the study of language. Language can be studied over a span of time as well as at a

point of time. The former, he called diachronic, and the latter, synchronic. Diachronic approach to the language study focuses on the changes in language over language over a span of time. Language is evolutionary and is not static. If we compare a passage from the fourteenth century English poet Geoffrey Chaucer with modern English, it will be clear that language has changed considerably. Diachronic study implies the study of the changes in language over a span of time. Synchronic approach to the study of language focuses on the systematic interconnections and rules of a long course of time. It is rather comparative and historical. It is comparative in the sense that it analyses the similarities and differences within a family of related languages. It is historical, because it focuses on the evolution of a family of languages or on the changes that occur within a particular combinations and organization of the constituent elements of a single language at a particular time.

LANGUE AND PAROLE

Saussure introduced an important distinction between langue and parole. A parole is any particular meaningful utterance. It may be spoken or written. It refers to the actual concrete act of speaking on the part of the individual. It is personal, dynamic and social activity. It exists at a particular time and place and in

a particular context. It is the only object available for direct observation by linguists. It is similar to Chomsky's idea of performance. Langue, on the other hand implies the underlying rules governing the combination and organization of the elements of language. It is the implicit system of elements, of distinctions and oppositions. It is the langue which makes it possible for a speaker to make an utterance and the listener to understand the same. In short, langue = grammar+ vocabulary + pronunciation system of a linguistic community.

COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE

Noam Chomsky has substituted Saussure's concept of language and parole with competence and performance. Competence is the tacit knowledge on the part of native speakers who have mastered or internalized the implicit conventions and rules of a language system. It is the competence which enables the speaker to make meaningful utterances and the listener to understand well- formed and meaningful utterances. Performance on the other hand is the actual utterance of particular sentences.

SEMIOTICS AND SEMIOLOGY

The terms semiotics and semiology are alternative names used to refer to the systematic study of signs. The only difference is that the term semiotics was introduced by the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce and the term

semiology was used by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure held the view that language is a semiotic system. (i.e. language is a system signs). Each linguistic sign is composed of a 'signifier' and the 'signified' 'Signifier' + signified - > sign. Signifier is the phonic or the graphic part of the sign. The signified is the referent or the concept or idea behind the signifier. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is purely arbitrary. This means that there is no positive relationship between the signifier and the signified.

INTER DISCIPLINARY APPROACH IN LINGUISTICS.

Interdisciplinary approach in linguistics implies connecting the study to other branches of knowledge and areas of life and experience. Linguistics has developed various dimensions. Scientists say that language is connected with the brain functions. This has led to the development of a new discipline called Neurolinguistics. Neurolinguists have studied the biological foundations of language and the brain mechanism underlying its acquisition and use. They have found that language is the function of the left hemisphere of the brain. Injuries to the left hemisphere result in language disorders called aphasia.

Noam Chomsky, the great American linguist regards language as a cognitive system. According to him, the

speaker of a language has certain mental structure which is different from that of a speaker who speaks another language. The study of the linguistic cognitive system has led to the growth of new disciplines such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and Neuro linguistics.

Psycholinguistics deals with the connection between language and the mind. It is the study of how the mentally represented grammar of language is employed in the production and comprehension of speech. In Chomskian terms, the mentally represented grammar of language is linguistic competence and the actual production and comprehension of utterance is linguistic performance. Language acquisition by children is one of the most prominent areas of Psycholinguistics. Thus the study of any language in a detailed manner helps in understanding the charm which is hidden in that language and the relationship it has with other languages.

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