

Language Determines the Ethnicity Within a Society

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Introduction

Language is very essential in our lives. It is the basic fundamental unit in every individual's life. It enables us to pose questions, report problems, seek help, crack jokes etc. Today's society speaks of language as the most significant of all.

Human beings engage themselves in speech to convey matters and perform other tasks to survive. Talking with each other by itself is a part of language. For every simple thing, even to ask someone for a direction to a place, one needs to talk, to converse with the other.

At the time of an interview one needs to both pose questions and reply with an answer. At the time of marriage, again language plays a very important function in the society. In day today life, language plays a major role in the activities of human beings.

Business dealings, educational activities, political movements, parliamentary debates and other communicational activities in educational Institutions are done through language.

Therefore, we come to know that without communicating through a language it is difficult to live comfortably and solve various issues in life in a society. Language and society go hand in hand. In other words, communication is also a key factor in mingling with the social crowd.

A Proper communication is required for a proper response and explanation. Grammar is to be noted where language is concerned but, still humans do commit mistakes in their speech and spellings in writings. All these may be neglected and ignored in few circumstances, not in all situations. Language is therefore a part of the human system of communication.

Language Families

Languages are grouped into families called language families. It is nothing but a group of similar related languages formed from the ancestral generation and this is termed as proto language. Based on the status of one's own family the ancestral language can be inherited and obtained. Even if the past history is known, the protolanguage would be easier to study.

For example, the proto-Romance language in the past which was considered to be the vulgar language was converted to as the proto Romance language. Protolanguage is thus indirectly known or discovered. Sanskrit was also the ancestral language for sub languages of the Indian subcontinent like Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, and Marathi and further these were placed under a common family called the proto-Indo – European language.

The sub-languages are called branches. The common ancestor, the proto Indo European language has Germanic, Romance and Slavic as branches. Maintaining relationships with languages is quite easy. If we trace the Romance languages wherein two thousand years ago, when Latin was considered to be the ancestral language in Italy, the Roman conquest later spread the Latin language across Europe.

Here, it then spread to other small regions and became a specific language to a specific social group. This Roman Empire further broke these small specific groups of languages into Romance languages that are well known namely – French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish and so on.

Romance is the branch of language for the Indo European language family. For example, look at

the word “water”, in all the three forms of Romance languages, the differences can be easily identified keeping the ancestral language in hand.

But not all cases have proof of the past history of language therefore, languages which have some common link with those of its descendants alone are considered among social groups. The word “water” might look similar when viewed within the social groups whereas it may not seem similar across groups.

Those languages that seem to be same within the group fall into the Indo European language family and the second which is across the group falls into the Slavic branch of language family. There is no past evidence or proof of the Proto-Germanic or the Proto-Slavic Language, still it is assumed that these two languages would have existed initially.

“Standard Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian are different national variants and official registers of the pluricentric Serbo-Croatian language”.^[1]

All the languages of the world belong to the family of languages. Some languages have no relatives or any kind of relationship and belong to what is called language isolates. These may contain fewer amounts of family languages. Basque is an example of an isolate family.

Isolate languages are known to have few relatives but recovery of its language would be minimal. These do not come under any of the family languages. Within families there may also be branches that fall under isolates such as Armenian which is an isolate that is within Indo European language.

Another example of an isolate language is Basque language. This language has no relationship with other languages. Despite its influence by the Romance languages, Basque language still stands unrelated to other languages and remains an isolate language.

Social setting of Language

According to the circumstance of a speech group a language will vary socially. For example, look

at the American English; it has a lot of varieties and specific groups belonging to a larger language called English.

These specific subsets or groups may differ in geography. In other words languages differ or express according to a group or identity. They can differ between the inside and outside the strangers and the known, the enemy from the friend. All these show how languages express their identity in its own unique way.

Families, couples, roommates, colleagues, friends, and kith and kin all other small sub groups present their language in a specific way according to the interest of an individual in the group and also express in the same specific manner.

“The shift from code and community as bounded units to language users and their languaging and ethnifying practices is premised on the conception of language as a social construction. Makoni and Pennycook (2007: 1) persuasively argue that languages are inventions and that their naming and development has been the outcome of social and semiotic processes. This assertion resonates with Heller's (2007: 2) view that language is seen as: a set of resources which circulate in unequal ways in social networks and discursive spaces, and whose meaning and value are socially constructed within the constraints of social organisational processes, under specific historical conditions”.^[2]

Those involved in business form a social group among themselves to satisfy, impress and perplex those outside the group. For instance, a two way communication between two people, we find two types of people – one who conveys a message to be superior or of greater power compared to the other who listens takes the subordinate place.

Normally people who have a poor language, conversation especially the larger social group who pronounce differently, those with different ethnic factors, other social sectors, variable ages etc. fall under a social dialect.

People of today sometimes for name sake when on media, or air tend to swear, but it's a question to think if they really mean they swear, they take up or just mere words. Gone are the days in the 1940's and 50's where they stick to what they swear.

Is there divergence among languages in developed sectors? This divergence may slowly create a great difference among various social sectors which may lead to differences in speech and communication.

Today, look at the trend where people make use of the internet, Email wherein all spellings, grammatical mistakes are all corrected and checked. This makes humans lazy and lethargic.

The mails and other letters have all turned to be informal. Those who have no proper writing or language skills are also boldly making use of such advantages as their work seems easy.

Moreover with the latest technology of the programming, system itself that checks mistakes, errors making use of graphics and other features on the computer, enhances all sectors of people to use language in different ways. Therefore, we notice that the standard of the level at which language is used is low. It has to develop from within.

Small communities should ensure the use of grammar, spellings, writing style and other such skills to make sure that the standard of language is brought up.

But instead, we lack such standards, especially when it comes to English. Although we may have efficient teachers, editors, writers who could guide us in our language, still the standard is low in many sectors.

English has now become a language as that of communication by display, design or a fluidic communication. If one is at work, in a high post, he or she has to speak the right language. Local or vulgar speech will only put down the individual and result in loss in job.

At the same time, it also depends on the type of job that we do and hold. Supposing it is a private firm, a vernacular language may be minimally considered or during the free time among friends, such languages could be spoken.

But when amidst higher officials and those with higher authority, one should know the right language skills to be applied.

Today, English is the leading official language where in people all over the world and nationally, understand and learn English, compared to other languages like Tamil or Telugu. Hindi may not be regarded as a professional or official language. There should never be clash among individuals just for the sake of language.

One should accept each other the way they are, no matter what languages they know and help one another learn different languages.

Regional Variations in Language

The different varieties in English that we come across today are all unique variants of language. These were all initiated during the British period promoting special key features like spelling, pronunciation, semantics and grammar in India.

Indian English is referred to as a superset of all these varieties of language; in other words regarded as "Indian Variants". There is regional variation in English where pronunciation is considered. Different regions add different flavours of pronunciation.

For example, Karnataka, Andhra, North Eastern India, Bengal, Orissa are all filled with differences in pronunciation in the language. If we compare the Indian English to the British way of pronunciation, there results a lot of Indians. Some examples to understand them are-diphthongs according to the British way of pronouncing is different compared to the Indian way; cake as ke-k and poor as pu-r etc.

The next is the alveolar sounds are harsher sounds according to the British pronunciation;

next the dental fricatives θ and d replaced by “soft h” and “soft d” (d) “v” and “w”.

According to the British they are pronounced similar to “w” throughout India. “V” and “W” sounds are merged with “b” in Bengali, Assamese and Oriya pronunciations of English language. ‘Vrindavan’ is pronounced as ‘Brindaban’ by East Indians.

There are also words in English which we create or frame and are used only in the Indian English. For example, words like prepone example prepone a trip, and foreign-return - those returned from abroad are all used by the Indian English language speakers.

Pluralisation ‘s’ of unnecessary words are also noticed in Indian English such as breads, foods, advices etc.

Numerous dialects have been formed in the Indian English that is totally different from the standard type of English that most educators establish. This helps us to differentiate a person’s background completely.

Dialects are normally influenced by other forms of languages from other sectors and groups of different regional languages along with English. One can easily find out if the person knows the Standard English by their phonology, pronunciation and so on, especially when the conversation is between two individuals of two different dialects.

Indian English is said to be a network of varieties comprising of both regional and occupational dialects that results as a complex language in the country.

Dialects like Malayali English, Tamilian English, Punjabi English, and Hindi English are all said to be widely recognized. These types are also accompanied by the local slang English language called the butter English like the Bazaar English and so on.

The Scottish English had rose because of these regional and socio economic dialects forms of language. Language as discussed earlier plays an

important role in differentiating members with their ethnicity.

“Has a nationality anything dearer than the speech of its father? In its speech resides its whole thought domain, its tradition, history, religion and basis of life, all its heart and soul. To deprive a people of its speech is to deprive it of its eternal good ... With language is created the heart of the people” (Herder 1783, cited in Fishman 1989: 105). ^[3]

Many researchers and scholars have also marked that language does play a significant role in determining the ethnic groups in a society.

Some scholars also commented the fact that language is the only sign that raises ethnic groups.

The ethnicity of any dialect can be found based on the language. Some scholars raise an assertive statement as to the relationship between language and ethno national group to be granted.

We will now do a detailed study of the ethnicity of language; how language plays a role in determining ethnic groups in the society.

Language as an Ethnic Distinction:

“The word “ethnic” is derived from the Greek *ethnos*. Originally meaning “number of people living together, company, body of men, band of comrades”, later in antiquity the word came to refer to “nation, people” and in its plural form, *ethnē*, it was used to denote “foreign, barbarous nations” as opposed to “Greeks” (Liddell and Scott, 1940)”. ^[4]

The ethnicity of a group can be identified by its member’s interest in performing tasks, the way they hold themselves etc.

Sometimes a particular member from the group may show a different attitude, have different interests in things may communicate differently, may also seek help in communicating the right way; such are the signs of ethnicity among groups of different regions.

A Chinese member from a group may show himself as a person from a minority class just to obtain opportunities and benefits. On the other hand the Taiwanese may refuse to stand out as Chinese, as they would fight for their freedom.

Every group may have their own ethnicity and unique features, but how we differentiate members of different ethnic groups is of importance.

We can differentiate based on the language, the biological heritage and their religious beliefs. If we look at the biological heritage it brings about an argument between various ethnic groups. The biological heritage also lacks proof from the past and is just interpreted.

Historical data or other socio-political features may not be a proof to detect ethnicity but still, when we come across differences between ethnic groups, it has to be confirmed and traced for ethnicity and language.

It is also very obvious that languages play a role in each one's life. Language is a part of communication in a way that it differentiates us based on our ethnicity, our culture, heritage etc. Not everybody from different social groups would understand each other's language or culture. Languages and society are related as one. Those communicating in a particular language belong to that specific society. Let us take for example, Mongolian and Chinese are languages from two different ends, and thus different societies with different ethnic factors.

Apart from language, religion also plays a role in discerning the ethnicity of a group. It also depends on the language and culture. For example Muslim is the official religion of Pakistan and Arabic being the sacred language, the script may vary and is therefore regarded as a different new language.

Thus in this example, we find how language and religion go hand in hand and are responsible for determining its ethnicity. The dialects differ between neighbouring regions in language.

There are a lot of examples to explain the above statement. For example, Serbian and Croatian have differences in grammar and vocabulary but still remain at an equal pace. Other examples are Bulgarian, Macedonian, Dutch, Danish etc, are all regarded as different languages with similar dialects.

All these vary and depend on the speaker. Though there are differences in grammar among these languages there still exists equality between the regions and their ethnicity. But still no recorded data exists.

Language may differ ethnically among subgroups; among different sectors and thus we find language a fundamental factor in determining the ethnic factor.

Next, we will also be moving into another form of language called Anti-language that is used to replace another word or meaning in communication, as a protective measure in communication.

Anti-Language

This type of a language is a language that is spoken within a specific major group by a subgroup. This subgroup may form an anti-language just for creating a new bond among its own members within a society.

In other cases, the main purpose to create a new language would be to maintain secrecy of what is spoken or done within the group members and not letting it known to members outside the subgroup the purpose is just as a protective measure against the external team. Thus in these above said cases, anti-language can be followed. This type of a language is also understood only by the people within the subgroup.

Thus secrecy is maintained by the members of the anti-society, wherein other outsiders will not be able to find out their secrets or even understand their language. All their activities and ideas are also maintained a secret.

This anti-language concept was brought about by M. A. Halliday who is a linguist as well. He came up with this idea when he generated an alternative word for the term *lingua franca*. He also made some criteria to be followed while using anti language principle. Anti-language is used just like another alternative for something else.

There are word lists that guide us with the previous historical records of different cultures and their languages. It is a modified type of a language like replacing an old for a new. Anti-language also involves correct usage of grammar and spellings.

Proper communication is essential, exchanging new words and their meanings to a layman should be practiced. Anti-language should not be misinterpreted as an alternative language, instead it should be known as the “second life factor”.

When people use anti-language, they make changes in words, spellings, involving change of original meanings for words and changing the entire language right from the beginning.

It is basically like a vehicle of re-socializing. Language and anti language are inter connected. Once it is used, in any conversation, it thereafter has to be maintained.

An example for anti-language is CB slang that generated in the 1980's by the truck drivers in USA. And later, it was spread to other countries like Mexico, Germany, and Canada. We therefore find records created in the past for anti-language usage.

Anti-language should never be considered a negative factor, as it helps to converse to people who may not even follow or understand the original context, in such cases new words made easier with better understandable codes or meanings can be given.

It is yet another form of communicating to one another. Society and language can be grouped together while; anti-society and anti-language can be grouped together.

Anti-language is also used if one lands in a new country of different culture, for example, the French region in Canada, one can make use of new words to overcome the language conflicts that might occur unnecessarily.

Thus we conclude that, Anti-language is very unique in its own form, it expresses new metaphors and words that are unknown.

CONCLUSION:

Language and society are related with each other. A good language enables in better communication. Without language, one cannot communicate properly. It also determines the ethnicity within a society.

There are languages of different regions with different pronunciations and grammar. Language and society is linked together and anti-language and anti-society are grouped together.

Anti-language is seen to be another form of language used mainly as a protective measure in terms of maintaining secrecy within groups.

Here, we have seen that in anti-language people change existing words their meanings and create new words for their own convenience and use,

Despite, culture, heritage and ethnicity, language stands as unique criteria in communication throughout the world. It is also important that we maintain a standard level of language. The standard of language should be high and given importance in acquiring new languages.

Languages are also important in debates at colleges, social and other organizations, business dealings etc. English is considered the most important official language in India when compared to Tamil and other regional languages.

Right from the Bazaar vendors to the higher officials at post, people know English in some way or the other. Be it the butler's English or the Standard English,

Indian English is considered to be of great value. Some people do not look into the grammar, pronunciations and other such aspects in a language.

The trend has changed today; people make use of the internet, modernized and computerized trend where everything is fed in the system.

One can handle it so easily, as the system itself checks for errors in grammar and spellings.

Thus we conclude that language is a part of the human communication and has a major role in the ethno- national society.

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