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## The essence of language in philology, logic and psychology

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**Abstract:** *Interest in language, how it originated, how it works and develops, has existed from time immemorial. For a long time the word “language” was a general notion used to mean the entire communicative means of man. For many, this was the broadest way of regarding language. Whatever earlier approaches to the nature of languages there have been, we realize now that language is a product of human society and can exist only in human society.*

*The origin of language is hidden in the depths of antiquity. But even the ancient civilized peoples, driven by the thirst for knowledge, tried to answer the question: how did language originate? Man’s search for the origin of language is deeply rooted. These inquiring spirits were driven by a desire to discover the entire history of language. As we have pointed out, the first impulse in Ancient Greece to understand the origin of language was based not on scientific research but on general philosophical premises.*

**Keywords:** *language, communication, expression, theoretical intelligence, meaning, language of gestures.*

### Introduction

The ancient Greeks made bold and persistent speculations on the origin, history and structure of language, and there were many legends among them on which language was the first to be spoken on the globe.

There is no language outside society. Language can be understood properly if it is studied in close connection with the history of human society. Language reflects the character, mentality and social activity of the people who use it.

Language is human and only human. The latest research has shown that some species of animals also communicate, but they do not talk in the sense in which we usually use this word. People can also use other means of communication, such as red lights, or flags, but these signs are interpreted into language. Language is the normal form and means of communication and it is determined by the social, economic and cultural history of the people speaking it.

To define language with precision is far less easy than, for example, to define “acid” or other chemical terms. This is because many scientific researches are interested in language-philosophers, psychologists, logicians, sociologist, as well as linguist, just for a start.

As language is closely connected with thinking and is considered a vehicle of thought it has fallen under the scrutiny of philosophers. Logicians study the laws of thinking and their reflection in language. Language is of social character by its origin (as we shall see below) and thus draws the attention of sociologists. Many definitions of language have been made by different thinkers.

Here some definitions of language that have been given by various scientists from several countries:

Hegel (1770-1831), the prominent German philosopher, said that “language is the art of theoretical intelligence in its true sense, for it is its outward expression.”

F. de Saussure (1857-1913), the famous French linguist, defined language as a system of signs expressing ideas.

B. Croce (1866-1952), an Italian philosopher, said: “Language is an articulated limited sound system organized for the purpose of expression.”

E. Sapir (1884-1939), an outstanding American linguist, considered language to be a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.

The American linguist L. Bloomfield (1887-1949) stated that language enabled one person to express a reaction to another’s stimulus. He considered language in terms of behavioral patterns like walking, eating, etc. According to this approach, this set of patterns can remain unused for

a long period of time and then be called into operation by an appropriate stimulus.

Different points of view in defining the integral features of language can be clearly seen in all these famous thinkers’ definitions. Many definitions of language have been put forward, but those given above are enough to show that none of them are exclusive. They bring out different aspects of language and supplement one another, but they do not give a comprehensive definition.

In defining language, everything depends on the investigator’s methodological starting-point and the aims with which he sets out.

All these definitions were influenced by various forms of idealistic philosophy.

The controversy in linguistics may be traced from ancient times when the first impulse to understand language came from the speculation of philosophers on questions involving language and its origin, and on the nature of language itself.

Ancient Greeks tried to explain the origin of language from the philosophical point of view. To be more exact, they did not deal with the problem of the origin of language but with the designation of the things which surrounded them. The ancient philosophers thought that a word must have a meaning either by nature or by convention. Either there was something in the nature of the thing described that made one particular word the right one for it, or there was no natural connection between the word and its meaning, and the thing was described by such-and-such a word only because a number of people had agreed on this meaning. These two different philosophical points of view may be called the natural school (Greek *phussei* “by nature”) and the conventional school (Greek *tessei* “by convention”). Idealistic philosophers of ancient Greece like Pythagoras and Plato belonged to the natural school and held that language had come into being out of “inherent

necessity” or “nature”, which Plato called “spirit”, while Democritus, whom called the most brilliant representative of materialism in ancient times, and Aristotle, believed that language had arisen by “convention” or “agreement” and that words are mere symbols. They considered that no name existed by nature but only by becoming a symbol. Their way of explaining the meaning of a word through arbitrary selection and acceptance was more materialistic because it showed people agreeing on name-giving conventions instead of appealing to an idealistic spirit.

A correct understanding of the essence of language depends upon one’s approach to the great fundamental questions of philosophy as a whole. The basis of all schools of philosophy is connected with the relation between thought and existence, spirit and nature.

Dividing the philosophers of all time into “two great camps”,-idealist and materialist,-showed that allegiance to one of these camps depends upon a correct solution of the question: “...in what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of the cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality?”

Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, declares the two main philosophic schools to be materialism and idealism. Materialism regards nature as primary and spirit as secondary; being is first, and thinking, second.

Philosophical materialism asserts that thinking, consciousness, being secondary in their character; nevertheless exist in reality in the same way, as different forms of movable matter. At the same time it indicates that just as one form of matter known as cerebrum stipulates the functioning of thought so this thought is accomplished in certain material form.

“From the start the ‘spirit’ is afflicted with the curse of being ‘burdened’ with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language.”

So, from the point of view of dialectical materialism secondariness of spirit, thinking, consciousness and primaries of matter is manifested in the fact that thinking, being closely connected with material physiological processes, can occur and occurs only by and with the help of language.

Alongside with the philosophical problem of the interrelation between thinking and language theory emphasizes the function of language as a kind of man’s cognitive activity, as a means of transfer of experience, gained in the past, to the future generations.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as far as the definition of language is concerned, only the materialistic viewpoint based on the theory which grasps the most essential aspect of language, is correct. “Language is the most important means of human intercourse.”

This definition describes comprehensively the essential substance of language. Now the question arises why language is the most important means of human communication. The answer will become clear if we analyze non-linguistic means of communication.

The transmission of meaning, the conveyance of significant concepts, may be realized not only by language, but also with sign-posts, the Morse code, gesture language and signal fires, and so on, i.e., by devices that have nothing to do either with spoken language or with its written counterpart. African natives, for example, use drums as a long-distance telephone. The same goes for the smoke signals of the American Indians.

Some non-linguistic forms of communication come close to spoken language. The

<sup>1</sup> I.V. Arnold “The English word” “Высшаяшкола” 1986, 387. p

whistling language used by the natives of Gomorra, in the Canary Islands, who can communicate in it over very long distances (about six miles), is one of these.

Other kinds of non-linguistic means of communication come close to written language, and are supposed by some to have been its embryonic form. The “quipu”, or “knots”, used by the Peruvian Incas, for instance, had red ropes to symbolize soldiers, yellow ropes for gold, white ropes for silver, green ropes for grain, with a single knot signifying 10, two knots 20, a double knot 100, and so on. The messages conveyed by means of the “quip” were so complicated that special officials called “quipucamayocuma”, or “keepers of the knots” were appointed to interpret them.

A third important field of non-linguistic communication is gestures, which have no connection with either spoken or written language. Gestures accompany all our speech. American Indian plain tribes, for example, accompany language with gestures, strange to us, but quite intelligible to them: the hand, palm in, thumb up, is held just under the eyes to represent spying; a fist is clapped into a palm for a shot; two fingers imitate a man walking, and four the running of a horse. Some call this gesture language the “Esperanto” of the primitive world.

Gesticulation as an aid to spoken language is universally used by all human communities on Earth, but to different degrees and with different symbolic meanings. Differences in the meanings of gestures are often striking, and are governed by social convention. To the Russians, for instance, a downward nod of the head means “yes”, and a shaking of the head from side to side, “no”. On the other hand, the modern Czech express “no” by a downward jerk of the head.

The question why the language of gestures did not become universal instead of spoken

language may be explained by the fact that it occupies the hands, it also requires light and clear view, while spoken language can be used in the dark and through obstacles.

We may say that systems of communication not based on speech, while extremely useful on special occasions, are generally inferior to spoken language as conveyors of meaning. Used side by side with spoken language, they can be good auxiliaries to it.

As we have seen, all these means of communication (called “sign-systems” in modern foreign linguistics) differ from each other both in their material form (sign-posts, signal fires, painting and so on) and in their structures and functions. But they differ from language to even greater extent. Some modern foreign linguists, such as the Danish philologist L. Helmsmen, do not acknowledge any difference between language and such signals as semaphore signs or the striking of a clock.

Some linguists admit that there are common features between language and other sign-systems. These common features are the following:

- (a) they serve as a means of expression, conveying ideas or feelings;
- (b) they are of a social character, as they are created by society with a view to serving it;
- (c) they are material in essence though their material form is different (sound-waves, graphic schemes, the Morse code, and so on);
- (d) they all reflect objective reality.<sup>2</sup>

But the differences between language and these sign-systems are more essential. They are as follows:

Language is the total means of expressing ideas and feelings and communicating messages from one individual to others, used by all people in all their spheres of activity. All other sign-systems are restricted in their usage and limited in their

<sup>2</sup>Galperin I.R. “Stylistics” M. 1971.241p.

expressive capacity. For instance, music conveys emotions, but it does not name them; it cannot express concepts and judgements, or transmit ideas. It embraces only those people who understand it and is limited to those musical works which have actually been created by composers. Other people can perceive this “sound system”, but they cannot use it actively.

(2) Language, conveys not only the essence of the facts, but the speaker’s attitude towards them, his estimation of reality and his will. Language is connected not only with logical thinking, but with psychology of people too.

(3) All sign-systems apart from language are artificial, and they are created and changed by convention. They are made not by the people as a whole, but by a relatively small group of representatives of the given speciality. The development of language does not depend upon the will of the members of society. Each generation adopts the language it is given historically, and the development of language may be characterized as a historical process with its own objective laws.

To sum up. All sign-systems are subsidiary to language. Each of them has its own advantages over language, such as precision, brevity, abstraction, clarity and so on. But none of them can replace language as the universal means of communication of people in all fields of activity, conveying ideas, thoughts, and emotions, and they cannot be called important for those reasons.

To answer the second part of the question, why is language the most important means of human communication, we shall consider the so-called “language” of animals.<sup>3</sup>

Some scientists claim that certain animal species communicate by non-linguistic devices; that

bees, for example, convey meaningful messages to one another by odour or by dancing in their hives, or that ants use their antennae in significant way. It must be pointed out that the marvelous coordination achieved by groups of animals can only be explained by some form of intercommunication. Sound as the medium for this is common enough: crickets, for instance, call other crickets by noisily rubbing the leg against the body.

As for chimpanzees, it may be taken as positively proved that their range of communication is entirely “subjective”, and can only express emotions, never designate or describe objects. Chimpanzees understand between themselves the expression of definite desires and urges.

Many desires are expressed by direct imitation of the actions desired. For instance, one chimpanzee who wishes to be accompanied by another, gives the latter a nudge, or pulls his hand looking at him and making the movements of “walking” in the direction desired. One who wishes to receive bananas from another, imitates the movement of snatching or grasping, accompanied by intensely pleading glances and pouts. Summoning another animal from a distance is often done by beckoning in a very human way.

Numerous investigations on monkeys has shown that the chimpanzee, for instance, obtains his object with the mutual understanding that exists between members of the same small local group. There is abundant evidence of this mutual understanding and solidarity. For example, when a member of a group of chimpanzees is punished with a blow, the whole group will set up a howl as with one voice. But they never do any common work: two apes may be similarly engaged, following a similar pursuit, in close proximity, but there is no co-operation between them.

It is generally agreed that the apes have so many phonetic elements which are common to

<sup>3</sup>R.S. Ginzburg , S.S Khidenel G.Y Knyazeva A.A SANKIN “A course in modern English lexicology “Высшая школа” 1979. 231. p

human languages that their lack of articulate speech cannot be ascribed to secondary limitations. The chimpanzee produces sounds which vary greatly in quality and intensity. Some investigators believe that the chimpanzee is able to utter 32 words or elements of speech.

R. L. Garner, in his book *Apes and Monkeys*, has described the language of monkeys as a grammarless system of monosyllables. He claims to have learned some of their words, and to have used them successfully to communicate with monkeys from other parts of the world. He says that there are sounds, which are easily identified but difficult to describe, such as that used to signify “cold” or “discomfort”, another for “drink” or “thirst”, another for “illness”. There are, perhaps, a dozen more words, he continues, that can be easily distinguished.

Many people would be surprised to learn that there have been dictionaries of animal words in existence for a long time.

The deficiency in this respect is to be referred not to bodily but to mental limitations—namely that they cannot be induced to imitate sounds. Their imitative tendency seems to be determined chiefly by visual stimuli, their reaction to objective reality.

We should emphasise that animal cries are characterized by invariability and monotony. Dogs have been barking, cats miaowing, lions roaring and donkeys braying in the same way since time immemorial, while all languages evolve to some extent. Human language, as opposed to animal cries, displays infinite variability, both in time and in space. Flexibility and change may be described as the essence of all living languages. Other characteristics of human speech are its abstraction and its great differentiation, that distinguish it from the signal-like actions of animals.

But “...what do we find once more as the characteristic difference between the troupe of monkeys and human society?—and he answers—“Labour!” his Capital puts his finger on another difference between animal and man. “A spider carries on operations resembling those of the weaver; and many a human architect is put to shame by the skill with which a bee constructs her cell. But what from the very first distinguishes the most incompetent architect from the best of bees, is that the architect has built a cell in his head before he constructs it in wax. ...What happens is not merely that the worker brings about a change of form in natural objects; at the same time, in the nature that exists apart from himself, he realizes his own purpose...”

A great contribution towards solving this problem was made by I.P. Pavlov, the distinguished Soviet physiologist and psychologist. His discovery of conditioned reflexes and description of the animal’s new nervous connections with its conditions of life represent a great step forward in the development of the theory of reflexes. Pavlov regarded conditioned or temporarily acquired reflexes as a function of the animal organism specially adapted to achieve a more and more perfect equilibrium between the organism and its environment.

Pavlov said: “When the developing animal world reached the stage of man, an extremely important addition was made to the mechanism of nervous activity. In the animal, reality is signaled almost exclusively by stimulations and by the traces they leave in the cerebral hemispheres, which come directly to the special cells of the visual, auditory or other receptors of the organism. This is what we, too, possess as impressions, sensations and notions of the world around us, both the natural and the social with the exception of the words heard or seen. This is the first system of signals of reality common

to man and animals. But speech constitutes a second signaling system of reality which is peculiarly ours, being the signal of the first signals. On the one hand numerous speech stimulations have removed us from reality, and we must always remember this in order not to distort our attitude to reality. On the other hand, it is precisely speech which has made us human... However it cannot be doubted that the fundamental laws governing the activity of the first signaling system must also govern that of the second because it, too, is activity of the same nervous tissue."

These theoretical generalizations of Pavlov's revealed the nature of higher nervous activity and led him to the concept of the first and second signaling systems, of which he regarded the latter as peculiar to the human brain.

To sum up, it was labour alone that created a new element, the appearance of which marked the birth of fully-fledged man, namely, society. And language, a doubly important medium having a close relationship to thinking and an essential social function, makes man human and fundamentally distinguishes him from the animals.

That is why language is the most important means of human communication.

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