

WORD-MEANING AND VARIETIES OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Language varies according to the situation in which it is used and these varieties of language can be referred to as registers. If we examine text we can make guesses about situation. If we are in a particular situation we make certain linguistic choices based on that situation. In other words, the language we use needs to be appropriate to the situation in which we use it. Language varieties refers to any form of a language whether regional dialect or social dialect or some other language code. Most of us range of language forms that differ in some ways from the Standard English that has been codified in grammar books and upheld by efforts to prescribe the way that people use. The language variety that a person associates with a particular social or regional identity may carry much psychological and emotional weight.

1. INTRODUCTION

We all know that language exists. The word „language“ cannot be defined. Language means what people speak or what they write. It has his own unique way and even one uses the same language in different ways depending upon who he is addressing and on what he is speaking, again we all speak differently from the way in which we write; considering all these circumstances, language cannot be defined. For instance words belong to the part of a language .Words change their meaning in spoken and in written form.

2. WORD -MEANING

Frank Palmer in his book Grammar has explained the difficulty of defining words. Normally word needs space between two words for instance when we print or write we use space, whereas in speech we do not leave break after each word .we leave break only when we breathe or when we switch over to a different idea or to a topic. In print we write “My dog Suji is very smart” When we utter the same sentence we do not hold for a moment. “MydogSujiiisverysmart” we do not hold for a moment it looks as though we do not leave gap between words considering the major difference between speech and writing, scholars suggest that words exist only in print or writing and not in speech.

Few differences can be seen in printing or writing, when we take word by word the meaning is different from the meaning of an entire sentence. For instance “Players” –one who plays, is it one meaning or three meanings. Again when two or more words are coined, the problem arise

“criminal” means one who has committed crime or murder, if we take “Criminal lawyer”-a lawyer who has committed some crime, but the proper division is “Criminal law”+er -, which means one who practices criminal law. So words are coined by four sources they are- Association, Connotation, Collocation and Semantic field.

3. ASSOCIATION

The meaning of a word derives from the things or ideas to which it is associated and this association can be personal, national or even historical. If a student had a strict teacher named Rita, when she grows up she thinks of a cruel teacher in later life whenever she hears the name Rita. So associations are based on emotional rather than rational attitudes. Sometimes society does not regard certain jobs with respect; the words which stand for some professions are associated with mean things. For instance, funeral undertakers call themselves “funeral directors”. The dustman likes to be called “refuse collector”. These changes in name take place because the original names were associated with dirty or menial jobs.

When we talk about racial discrimination we immediately associate with Nelson Mandela, again when we talk about “non-violence” and “non-co-operation” though the term is considered as a general term we associate with Mahatma Gandhi. Association plays an important role in our day-to-day life. Any comparison or simile or metaphor is based on association of ideas. All poets, dramatists, novelists and other great writers use powerful figures of speech which are based on association.

The history of the word “villain” explains how meanings of words are derived from association. In the Middle English period, the French people became the ruling classes in England; they owned lands, estates and castles; the native Anglo-Saxons had to work under them. The word „Villa” (French) meant the landlord’s house. The Anglo-Saxon serfs who worked on the estates and castle of the French lord were called “villeins”. These villains were uneducated; their speech was rude and their manners and way of life uncouth. So the idea of rudeness and roughness was associated with the word “villein”: by further association of rudeness the present meaning associated with evil behaviour and wicked motive developed. The spelling is also changed now: villain.

4. CONNOTATION AND DENOTATION

These two words are meant to explain the meanings of given words. Connotation carries the both positive and negative meaning; denotation gives exact dictionary meaning which is nothing but literary meaning. A simple example a white dove which means a bird - with a small head and a tail, a messenger bird, this is denotation that we find in a phrase and the connotation for the same word is -symbol for peace and innocence. An example of denotation can be found in the poetic work of Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall”:

“And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.”

In the above lines, the word “wall” is used to suggest a physical boundary which is its denotative meaning but it also implies the idea of “emotional barrier”. William Wordsworth in his poem “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” says

“A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:

She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Wordsworth makes a contrast between a living girl and a dead girl in the first and second stanza respectively. We are familiar to the meanings of the words used in the last line of the second stanza; rock, stone and tree but the poet uses them connotatively where rock and stone imply cold and inanimate object and the tree suggests dirt and thus the burial of that dead girl. Look at the following lines from Shakespeare’s play “As you Like It”:

“All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,”

Shakespeare moves away from the denotative meanings of words in the above lines in order to give a symbolic sense to a few words. “astage” symbolizes the world, “players” suggests human beings and “parts” implies different stages of their lives.

Hence denotations are generally restricted meanings. Writers, therefore, deviate from the denotative meanings of words to create fresh ideas and images and associate them with to

common or ordinary words. Readers find it convenient to grasp the connotative meanings of words because of the fact that they are familiar to their literal meanings.

5. COLLOCATION

Collocation means placing of words together to give meanings or it can be the combination of the meanings of the words. Sometimes peculiar new meanings which are associated with the individual words. According to English language a very common collocation is nothing but an adjective + noun example clever girl, ferocious dog. Sometimes a verb is made to function like an adjective; e.g. sometimes two words which are separated are really in collocation. For example the girl who dressed in saree and who brought her brother to the church is a Professor; the girl is a Professor is the proper collocation. Collocation is of two types –expected collocation and unexpected collocation.

Collocation also differs by placing of words or by coining a phrase or framing a sentence by doing so the originality of collocation is lost. Such collocations are called Clichés. On the other hand the unexpected collocations attract our attention, because of our unusual combinations. They make interesting sense and these sort of collocations can be seen only by Poets, children or by any genius person. Sometimes collocation requires a different meaning which is not based on the component parts example a black smith, white lie, red hand and so from the given examples the colour has nothing to do with the meaning of the idioms. Thus the name of such collocation is known as “idioms”. In idioms the meaning of the combination is different from the sum of the meanings of the individual words.

6. SEMANTIC FIELD

The meaning of a word derives from the existence of other word in the same field which indicate related ideas or things. For example the meaning of “Water” not a hot water, not a cold water, not a hard water, not a purified water etc. So without the existence of other related terms, the meaning of “water” is meaningless.

In a country where dogs are plenty, people have many words to differentiate the varieties of dogs, German shepherd, Australian shepherd, Berger Blanc Suisse, Water Spaniel, and so on in such a place people who are experts in dog breeding or dog lover use all the different names, while to a people who do not have much occasion for the use of the animal, general name “dog” is enough.

Thus word-meaning is acquired through personal, religious, social, and national associations. Collocation also gives new meaning of a word is partly deducted from other words related to it in the same field. Word meaning is not easy to understand. Any word is related to its past life, present life, political changes, based on religion, or culture or tradition- all are embedded in the word and their meanings. Thus the attitude of the speakers is also seen consciously or unconsciously in the selection and use of the words.

7. VARIETIES OF LANGUAGE

Normally our spoken language differs, based on the person we interact or on the situation. Informal with our close associates and formal with our strangers, sometime even with the same person different jargon is used based on the circumstances. According to Wallwork In Language and Linguistics, has commented these statement

Most of us speak quite differently when we speak to different people; to a child, to a friend, or to a superior at work. With some we are relaxed, with others formal; some are intimates, and others are strangers or near-strangers. We even speak differently to the same person when we meet him in different circumstances; at work we use the jargon of the office, on the golf course we switch to the different, more informal jargon of the club-house.

8. IDIOLECT

Idiolect is defined as individual unique speech. Every individual has his own taste and style of walking which is unique to him, so does he have a unique way of uttering the same sounds of a language and combining the elements available. David Crystal in his book *Linguistics* writes;

In particular we should note two terms. The first is the use of term dialect, referring to the language system of a small community than that referred to by language; next is idiolect, which refers to that part of the language of a community that which exists within the individuals at any stage of his linguistic development. My idiolect is totally command or knowledge of my language.

Regional dialect is defined as a variety of language spoken by people in a different continent (area). Thus this spoken language results in difference in accent and the choice of words According to H.A Gleason remarks in *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*

One of the most evident facts about speech is its variability. If a large body of utterance in a given language is examined it will be found that no two of them are identical Before any description of speech can be made it is necessary to bring some sort of order into the date.

In England there are 30 regional dialects, Even Bernard Shaw has pointed out that no Englishman can open his mouth without pronunciation, accent and intonation. Thus the speech of any region in England is not identical with the other men.

In England regional characteristics in pronunciation and accent are usually considered low. A Scottish accent is considered to be superior to an Irish or Welsh one. But within Scottish, Glasgow is a town and so its speech is held superior to that of Edinburgh. Yorkshire enjoys a better status Lancashire. These two are taken to be one and are regarded as inferior by the southerner. Such judgments are instinctive and difficult to rationalize

In the ancient time people had very less chances to communicate with one another, the result was transportation; the reflection is seen in communication. So the difference is sorted out well.

People get easily influenced with local dialect. Whereas now when the chances are very high because of latest technology. People get frequent chances to switch over to other country and get influenced by the same country dialects. Efforts have been taken to reduce the different dialects, this is done through education. Though there are different regional dialects, but in television, newspapers and Radio follow Standard English which reaches across the country.

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry individual*

Jim: „We“s safe, Huck, we“s safe! Jump up and crack yo“ heels. Dat“s de good Cairo at las“, I jis knows it.”

Huck: “I“ll take the canoe and go see, Jim. It mightn“t be you know.”

Which means

“We“re safe, Huck, we“re safe! Jump up and dance! There“s the good old city of Cairo at last, I just know it.

“I“ll take the canoe and go and see, Jim. It might not be Cairo, you know.

It is useful to consider “social dialect”: People who belong to particular profession speak among themselves in a special dialect. The usual problem for writers when they picture characters is this: whether to report their speech with exact accent or to modify their speech. If the writer reproduces the exact work it will definitely reach to an unexpected level unless the dialect is understood by the reader. If the writer modifies the speech, it is understood by all the reader but the true essence is lost. The same thing is discussed by Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads*. He feels that language of the rustics of the Lake District is best suited for poetry.

9. STANDARD ENGLISH

People in and around London have a king of Standard English over the past four or five centuries. It doesn“t mean that people in England use Standard English or its spoken form which is known as Received Pronunciation. In different parts of England people carry business in their own dialect but at least in writing a minimum of Standard English is followed. This Standard English is seen in most of the novel, political document, journalism, books etc. The development of speech in London is Received Pronunciation but this Received Pronunciation is not followed by English people. Whereas Received Pronunciation is understood by the entire world. The only Received Pronunciation can be heard in BBC. When BBC uses the Standard English the other dialect language goes below the margin. Daniel Jones in *English Pronouncing Dictionary* has applied the same principle like BBC following the Standard English in giving the transcription of words as in Received Pronunciation.

10. REGISTER

Register is nothing but a variety of language. It is like a man get contact with different set of people under different circumstances and uses different sets of combination of words. The way he speaks at home is different from office and rest of places, for example. At home his communication doesn't have coherence.

Did you wash your feet? Mind dog will bite you. Take your book and study but when same person is in office his communication is like this with the students collect your papers. Take a note of your time table. Clean the board and so on. So a vast variation is seen in both the communication. It is clear when a man moves from one Register to another his choice of words also varies. In present generation we have command over many registers and move from one to the other. In museum, hospital, Park and in other places a man may employ different register to talk the same topic.

11. MODE

There are two modes of the use of language; Spoken, written. In speech we all tend to be at ease when compared to writing because we take utmost care to frame sentence. Whereas when we speak to our friends we are informal. It is like a professor giving utmost care for his publication rather than his lecture classes.

12. FIELD

Field is the subject matter which belongs to a technical category, domestic, social and also sub-divide these for greater nicety and precision, for example biology, mechanical, electronics, commerce, linguistics etc.

13. TENOR OF DISCOURSE

This type of discourse may be formal or informal. When being with close associates we are informal. On the other hand when we address in a meeting or when we mingle with stranger we be formal. In written mode-scientific field formal tenor is used but with very high percentage of passive voice with a heavy scientific vocabulary.

It is difficult to categorize all the registers and the field to which they belong. We can't arrive to a conclusion whether Journalism is written in formal tenor or informal tenor. But still two different newspapers slightly vary in their style (terminology), so no written matter will be identical.

14. RESTRICTED CODE AND ELABORATED CODE

If a child is restricted to move outside from his own village, the child has less opportunities to mingle with others. So naturally his choice of vocabulary will be based on his domestic,

society and his work place the possession of vocabulary is less. If the same child is allowed to move freely to other states the child covers a wide distinct of vocabulary and a better command of language. So a child said to have an elaborated code.

15. CONCLUSION

Language is not science nor it can be learnt by scientific method. In science we do get immediate conclusion which is variable but in language many grammarians tend to be scientific, they cannot do so, because language varies from person to person, place to place, context to context and so forth. Therefore most of our observation and conclusions are not scientifically perfect and can't be. Thus language is complex arbitrary and evolutionary. So the definition of word and varieties of language are only observation and scientifically proved. This only helps us in our approach to language

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