

Speaking The Language Of Thought

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Abstract:

Language reflects thought, which itself is influenced and moulded by language. It is essential both for expressing and working out ideas. Many great speakers use language as a game to trap their opponents, while others may view language as more purely functional and straightforward. Precisely, language alone makes abstract thought and concepts possible. The relationship between thought and language may seem baffling, even pointless, in a chicken-and-egg sort of way for many second-language speakers. In a wider sense, gestures often count for more than words. In situations of frustration and tension, the same applies. The expression makes the need for description redundant. Yet, once we are aware of the communication, we start to conceptualize and respond to it, but as soon as we do so, language creeps back in. the relation of a word to the object it denotes is not merely one of identity with that object as its referent—as seems apparent in a statement ‘The Evening Star is the Evening Star’—for how otherwise do we explain the statement ‘The Evening Star is the Morning Star’? There is also a word’s sense in virtue of which it has that relation to its referent. We can then see how a word or proposition may have more than one sense according to its context and thus it is one particular sense that bears the reference to its referent(s) for each occasion of use. In other words, depending on the context, a single word can refer to a range of different things, or a range of words can refer to a single thing. Thus, although there is no simple identity of word and referent, the essential feature of words is that they do have a sense that relates to a referent—there is still a linking of object and word.

Keywords: Language, Thought, Expression, Communication, Referent, Sense, Context, Identity, Words.

Introduction:

Language is autonomous and not dependent on reality. Although it is a social institution, its changes are interdependent of its speaker’s will, which has implications for the idea of language structuring thought. The connection between language and thought is seen in the standardization of language and its consequences for views of mental capacity. A standard language such as English grew up because a particular part of the country came to dominate, culturally as much as politically, the rest of the world concerned. Growing concentrations of power, wealth, and prestige helped English to become the 'standard' language. However, once this occurs, there is a two-way connection between it and its speakers' attitudes to the language itself and to those who do not use it. It becomes an instrument of exclusion to the latter, but its proponents also find their attitude to it developing into prescriptivism, which in its extreme form, condemns users of older, non-standard types of as mentally deficient.

In English, the view of the prestige status of a linguistic variety has extended to what linguists regard as confusion between the requirements of logic and language –‘confusion,’ which Logical Positivists would support and ordinary language philosophers would not. The difficulty is seen best by the grammatical prescriptivism, which developed in the 18th and 19th centuries through measuring English against Latin through exposure to the logical thinking of the time. Dr. Johnson’s Dictionary, the first detailed attempt to standardize

spelling, was published in 1755. Such rules as not splitting infinitives or ending a sentence with a preposition, were forced onto a language to which they did not apply, since the practice of Latin merely reflects a state of affairs: the Latin infinitive is one word and cannot be split, but it can happen in English, and the ability to end with a preposition was something introduced to English via Scandinavian languages, although not possible in Latin. Equally, a double negative is universal in many European languages and was so in Old and Middle English, i.e., up to the 15th Century, but when logic was applied, the conclusion was that two negatives make a positive, and therefore the linguistic form made no logical sense. The importance of these facts for their analysis lies in both in the use of language for the manipulation society, and the expectations of its logical structure. The Genevan psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980) developed a constructivist theory about the relationship between language and thought. This opposed Chomsky's view of the innate capacity (our natural ability to use language), suggesting that the development of linguistic structures depends on the extent to which conceptual knowledge is established.

We need to distinguish between Linguistics and the philosophy of language. Linguistics is the study of language on all levels; its function, its vast diversity—more than 4,500 separate languages have been discovered—its history, grammar, breakdown of sounds and words, meaning, social use, physical and psychological origin and development. What linguistics discovers may be applied to philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology or physiology, but as a discipline of study, it remains independent of them. Piaget proposed the order of acquisition of various skills and senses. For instance, the sense of object permanence, which enables a child to search for something it no longer has in view, is necessary before a child can give these objects permanent linguistic status by naming them. Notice how this contrasts with the view put forward earlier put by Bertrand Russell, that the structure of language influences that of thought. He suggested, for example, that a possible cause of the whole Aristotelian idea of the existence of substances is to be found in the subject-predicate logic. Thus he wrote: “Substance is a metaphysical mistake, due to transference to the world-structure of the structure of sentences composed of a subject and a predicate.”

There are instances, where we have no word for a particular concept, even in our adult vocabulary, e.g., the collective name ‘groceries’ can be used for things bought at newsagents. But equally, some concepts are obviously dependent on language, where meaning is worked out after an idea is named. Cultural relativism is evident here in the case of the definitions frequently used words being learned sooner and more accurately. For example, ‘left’ and ‘right’ is used in most cultures more than ‘east’ and ‘west’ to describe relative positions, and, in these societies, are familiar to children earlier than ‘east’ and ‘west.’ But some languages do use compass points for this purpose, and of these, some are even without words for left and right. So, concepts that are learned through language will vary according to the style used, thus proving some influence of language on thought. Imagine the situation at a dance where we are not sure of the steps. How could we learn to dance without knowing our right from our left? The concepts of ‘right’ and ‘left’ are essential for communication but do not correspond directly to anything perceived. Learning them and using them correctly requires some sophistication. In moments of stress, they may be confused - with resulting embarrassment if we are trying to learn dance, or even if we are on a military parade ground.

Thus, words are purely arbitrary, having no actual content (essence) and no direct connection with what is named. Each word divides the world into those things to which it can be applied and to those to which it cannot.

Given that the interest of Indian thinkers was primarily epistemological, they were mainly concerned with the nature of our cognitive acts (by which we come to know something) and in particular the constructive side of those acts. This inevitably led to a concern with language or speech and the role, or non-role that it might play in perception, which was considered as representative of such acts. Precisely, our opinions share our experiences. We perceive something as an experience separate from another because of our system of representation, and we divide these experiences up via language. Thus, an investigation of the word is the investigation of the structure of knowledge, of the ways organizing the world, and above all of being. On the whole, there are no boundaries, except those that we draw as we use a word. The meaning is in our own intention. For several language thinkers, natural language is perfectly adequate, and it is its misuse rather than its imperfection that created language problems. Apparently, we must always go back to how a word is used in its own language. Nevertheless, words are the representation of ideas/thoughts/emotions of people, places, and events but prejudiced by civilization and ambience. Language is not the driver of thought but thought can, in due course, result in language. Thinkers often deepen us with new and innovative language constructs to materialize their thoughts. So, in this case, they generate language with their thoughts. Hence, the fundamental idea inferred from the above deliberations is that language and thought ad infinitum shift back and forth from thought to language and language to thought. Language facilitates us to assume with an explicit summit of outlook and thought again widen the language. And thought is not merely being articulated in words, it also comes into existence through them. Every thought relates one object to another and it shifts, grows and develops, executes the function and solves the problem. This flow of thought occurs as an inner movement which can be based on language and can also be without language.

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