

Politics of Language in Humanism: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: Language is an open-ended system. That's why the users of language(s) can play with it and new discourses have been created in the society through language. As humans, we usually create ideas or thoughts according to our need and situation. We use language for various purposes. Both our everyday discourse and need of existence generate politics in our conversations. Actually, language itself is a politics in various ways. This article highlights different aspects of the politics of language in humanism.

Keywords: Language, Politics, Humanism, Social judgements, Movement

Introduction

We, the human beings, are the thinking creatures. We use language to express our thoughts, emotions, feelings to others. Actually, language is something which is biological. In fact, language can be treated as a biological phenomenon. According to Aristotle, speech is the representation of the experience of the mind. When we act, we use our experience; when we talk, we use our experience. With language, people create, people modify. And the politics begins.

Language is generally regarded as having two primary aspects: it is the means of communicating content, and the medium of language itself has an aesthetic value. In face-to-face verbal interaction, content tends to be most prominent, unless the texture of the language is heavily emphasized such as singing, chanting, shouting, whispering or verse recital, and so on. In speech, hearers can stop a speaker for clarification, and can take cues from the immediate context or from gestures and facial expressions. (Robson and Stockwell, 2005)

People use one or several languages to fulfil their desires. Social judgements have been created through language by the people and they like to enjoy freedom in making conversations, that's why they change their languages according to their own personal perceptions. Basically, in using language, we use our existing knowledge. Politics becomes common phenomenon in language. According to Noam Chomsky, a language is a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements. This definition of language considers sentences as the base of a language. Sentences may be limited or unlimited in number, and are made up of only limited components (Maniruzzaman, 2014). This creativity of language makes language unique and political. Actually, creativity of language makes language powerful.

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Literature Review

According to George Yule (2010), in Charles Darwin's vision of the origin of language, early humans had already developed musical ability prior to language and were using it "to charm each other". This may not match the typical image that most of us have of our early ancestors as rather rough characters wearing animal skins and not very charming, but it is an interesting speculation about how language may have originated. It remains, however, a speculation.

The Natural Sound Source: A quite different view of the beginnings of language is based on the concept of natural sounds. The basic idea is that primitive words could have been imitations of the natural sounds which early men and women heard around them. When an object flew by, making a caw-caw sound, the early human tried to imitate the sound and used it to refer to the thing associated with the sound. And when another flying creature made a coo-coo sound, that natural sound was adopted to refer to that kind of object. The fact that all modern languages have some words with pronunciations that seem to echo naturally occurring sounds could be used to support this theory. In English, in addition to cuckoo, we have splash, bang, boom, rattle, buzz, hiss, screech, and forms such as bow-wow. In fact this type of view has been called the "bow-wow theory" of language origin. Words that sound similar to the noises they describe are examples of onomatopoeia. While it is true that a number of words in any language are onomatopoeic, it is hard to see how most of the soundless things as well as abstract concepts in our world could have been referred to in a language that simply echoed natural sounds. (Yule, 2010)

The Social Interaction Source: Another proposal involving natural sounds has been called "yo-he-ho" theory. The idea is that the sounds of a person involve in physical effort could be the source of our language, especially when that physical effort involved several people and the interaction had to be coordinated. So, a group of early humans might develop a set of hums, grunts, groans, and curses that were used when they were lifting and carrying large bits of trees or lifeless hairy mammoths. The appeal of this proposal is that it places the development of human language in a social context. Early people must have lived in groups, if only because larger groups offered better protection from attack. Groups are necessarily social organizations, and to maintain those organizations, some form of communication is required, even if it is just grunts and curses. So, human sounds, however they were produced, must have had some principled use within the life and social interaction of early human groups. This is an important idea that may relate to the uses of humanly produced sounds. (Yule, 2010)

The Physical Adaptation Source: Instead of looking at types of sounds as the source of human speech, we can look at the types of physical features humans possess, especially those that are distinct from other creatures, which may have been able to support speech production. We can start with the observation that, at some early stage, our ancestors made a very significant transition to an upright posture, with bipedal (on two feet) locomotion, and a revised role for the front limbs. In the study of evolutionary development, there are certain physical features best thought of as partial adaptations, which appear to be relevant for speech. They are streamlined versions of features found in other primates. By themselves, such features would not necessarily lead to speech production, but they are good clues that a creature possessing such features probably has the capacity for speech. (Yule, 2010)

The Tool-Making Source: In the physical adaptation view, one function (producing speech sounds) must have been superimposed on existing anatomical (teeth, lips) previously used for other purposes (chewing, sucking). A similar development is believed to have taken place

with human hands and some believe that manual gestures may have been a precursor of language. By about two million years ago, there is evidence that humans had developed preferential right-handedness and had become capable of making stone tools. Wood tools and composite tools eventually followed. Tool-making, or the outcome of manipulating objects and changing them using both hands, is evidence of a brain at work. The human brain is not only large relative to human body size, it is also lateralized, that is, it has specialized functions in each of the two hemispheres. Those functions that control the motor movements involved in complex vocalization (speaking) and object manipulation (making or using tools) are very close to each other in the left hemisphere of the brain. It may be that there was an evolutionary connection between the language-using and tool-using abilities of humans and that both were involved in the development of the speaking brain. Most of the other speculative proposals concerning the origins of speech seem to be based on a picture of humans producing single noises to indicate objects in their environment. This activity may indeed have been a crucial stage in the development of language. (Yule, 2010)

The Genetic Source: We can think of the human baby in its first few years as a living example of some of these physical changes taking place. At birth, the baby's brain is only a quarter of its eventual weight and the larynx is much higher in the throat, allowing babies, like chimpanzees, to breathe and drink at the same time. In a relatively short period of time, the larynx descends, the brain develops, the child assumes an upright posture and starts walking and talking. This almost automatic set of developments and the complexity of the young child's language have led some scholars to look for something more powerful than small physical adaptations of the species over time as the source of language. Even children who are born deaf (and do not develop speech) become fluent sign language users, given appropriate circumstances, very early in life. This seems to indicate that human offspring are born with a special capacity for language. It is innate, no other creature seems to have it. The investigation of the origins of language turns into a search for the special "language gene" that only humans possess. (Yule, 2010)

Language possesses the following features (Maniruzzaman, 2014):

- Language is arbitrary.
- Language is a system.
- Language is symbolic.
- Language is systematic.
- Language is human.
- Language is non-instinctive.
- Language is vocal.
- Language is articulatory.
- Language is conventional.
- Language is a social phenomenon.
- Language is culture-related.
- Language is open-ended and changing.
- Language is a means of communication.
- Language is structurally complex.
- Language is natural.
- Language is creative.
- Language is shared phenomenon.
- Language is both oral and auditory.
- Language is habitual.

M Maniruzzaman says (2014), we (human beings) alone have had the gift of language; we are social beings; we work and cooperate with each other; we exchange with each other; we express our ideas and emotions, we communicate! Hence, language contributes to everything relating to our action, interaction, intention, passion, and so forth manifesting our existence.

Language is an inseparable part of human life and society. Human civilization has been possible solely through language. That is, it is through language only that humanity has come out of the Stone Age and developed science, art, and technology in a substantial manner, to an astonishing extent. Language functions as a means of communication; it is arbitrary; it is a system of systems. We know that speech acquired naturally is primary, whereas writing learned formally is secondary. (Maniruzzaman, 2014)

Language Change and the Politics of Creating New Meaning

People are the users of language. Because of the social consequences, languages change when new words are created or when old words get new meanings. According to Foley (2013), a language that never changes is really a dead language; people no longer use it. This is because when people use languages, they always need to modify and adapt their languages to suit their different purposes or to express new ideas. Foley (2013) also asserted that this is how new dialects, new registers and new genres come about. Actually, the politics is language change because people and their activities change and this includes the kinds of ideas and values that people want to express, as well as the ways in which it is considered appropriate to express them.

One important factor in language change is when large groups of people move from one location to another. Movement across locations, and this includes large scale migrations, will affect people's patterns of interactions. The more a group of people are constantly interacting with each other, the more similar will their use of language be. This is because regular interaction tends to result in the participants coming to share similar conventions and assumptions about how to use language. This includes norms about what kinds of phrases are appropriate for what kinds of activities, and what kinds of words to use when referring to something. But when a group splits up so that some members have moved into new surroundings, perhaps a new country even, then the original group and the new group will, over time, develop different ways of speaking. This is especially the case if the original group and the new group now have little or no contact with each other. Over time, these two groups will effectively come to develop very distant ways of speaking. (Foley, 2013)

J. A. Foley (2013) mentioned that language is that it has names. We need to be willing to pay attention to uses of language that may not have a name, such the kind of English that people use to write newspaper articles (we might call this 'Journalistic English') or the kind of English that people use to sell goods (we might call this 'English for Commercial Purposes'). But in other cases, it is not even a specific variety that might be relevant in a given situation; it might be a specific sound or sets of phrases. For example, in the early study, William Labov (1972) showed that in New York, the presence of a postvocalic [r] – this is when the [r] in words like car or four is pronounced – was associated with high social status while its absence was associated with low social status. Rather than thinking of people as possessing 'English', it might be more accurate to think of people as having a linguistic repertoire, or many varieties of the 'same' language or just bits and pieces of a language. The wider a person's repertoire, then, the more socially adaptable he/she is likely to be.

Politics of Human Language

In the case of gendered language, it is evident that male languages and female languages are different. Sex becomes a scale of measuring the status of language in the society. Simone de Beauvoir claimed that 'one is not born a woman; rather, one becomes a woman'. According to Robson and Stockwell (2005), this immediately draws the distinction between biological sex and the social construction of expectations, behavior, patterns of thinking and economic role that is gender. That language use is partly determined by the gender of speaker and hearer is apparent in numerous sociolinguistic studies that appear to show that men and women use language differently, and this is a politics in human language.

According to Bloch and Trager – A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols, by means of which a social group co-operates. Robson and Stockwell (2005) said that many people see the language that they speak and write as a fundamental part of their identities. Differences between languages are often said to lie behind differences in national character, suggesting that language both shapes and reflects the identities not only of individuals but also of regions and of whole cultures. The view that there is a natural link between the linguistic cultures into which someone is born and their own sense of self lies behind the idea of the 'mother tongue'. Most people are aware of accents and dialects within their own language, and will make judgments based upon their perceptions of them. Within the English language, we might think most obviously of the differences between, for example, British English, American English and Australian English.

In Aristotle's *Politics*, he makes connection between speech and politics. Basically, this is a talk between good and evil. Non-human animals are capable of feeling and expressing pleasure and pain, but only human animals are capable of making value judgements about experiences. Further, it is the fact that such judgements may be held in common that founds institutions such as the household and the state. Speech founds politics itself. This is partly what lies behind Aristotle's famous description of man as a 'political animal'. Speech is not simply one faculty among others. (Robson and Stockwell, 2005)

According to Robson and Stockwell (2005), this concern with the linguistic expression of ideas and values such as goodness or justice is important because it allows us to think about why people behave in the ways they do. As Terry Eagleton (1991) puts it: One can understand well enough how human beings may struggle and murder for good material reasons – reasons connected, for instance, with their physical survival. It is much harder to grasp how they may come to do so in the name of something as apparently abstract as ideas. Yet ideas are what men and women live by, occasionally die for. What Eagleton is referring to, of course, is the realm usually called politics.

In thinking about the relationship of language to forms of social interaction, we need to think about the concept of ideology. It was for some years a very unfashionable term, being associated with an unstable form of classical Marxism. Like the 'class struggle' or the 'proletariat', ideology was too early associated with an era which – with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disintegration of the Soviet system, the 'end of history', emergence of globalization and 'the third way' – was felt to bear little relation to the political terrain of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Much of the criticism of the concept of ideology came from within leftist thought itself, and this combined with liberal, humanist and right-wing pressure to cause the term to lose favor. (Robson and Stockwell, 2005)

Conclusion

Language constructs society and its culture. Speech community of a country establishes their ideology and perception among the citizens for building the nation. According to Bloomfield, the totality of the utterances that can be made in a speech community is the language of that speech community. Actually, language performs to create something new, and that is the politics of language. In this way, language generates new meaning, and these new meanings develop both new philosophy and reformed society. Language is creative, and for this feature of language, people are able to make literature. We know that literature develops human cognition and consciousness. Noam Chomsky says, when we study human language, we are approaching what some might call 'human essence', the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man. So, language is human and language is power.

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