

Language as a political tool for social change

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Abstract

Language is seen as a central tool in every human activity. It is the medium of communication: the core of human existence. Language performs communicative functions in both interpersonal and intrapersonal sociolinguistic circumstances. It has been found to be the most effective tool for reaching, convincing and bringing change in human interactions. The use of language in politics, education and society has a transformative effect on the individuals. This paper examines the use of language as a tool to communicate political ideas and thoughts with the aim of changing the behaviour or attitude of the people thereby presenting language as effective instrument for social change.

Introduction

Language is a system of rules in which sound structure and meaning are integrated for communication. It is the basis of existence of social interaction, political grouping and indeed of human communication. Lyons (11) states that “medium transferability” is the most important property of language. It is the property that contributes to the flexibility and adaptability of language system. For Anyachonkeya and Anyachonkeya (446), the role of communication includes “integrative, informative, persuasive and regulative”. Language is the only means through which an attempt to explain, evaluate, analyse or even justify human behaviour. It is one of the devices, if not the most important instrument used by politicians to manipulate or persuade the masses. Language and Society are two different semiotic systems complementing and interpreting each other, (Benveniste, cited by Kloch, 204). Language makes it possible for society to exist in a symbolic and real manner, facilitates articulation of needs and imagining, group consolidation, a sense of belonging which finally contributes to the creation of identity. Language becomes the means to interpret society, (Benveniste, 254).

There are usually many varieties of language. It provides the unique medium through which the belief system, world-view, moral values and virtually all the basic ingredients of any given society are passed on from one generation to another. The important thread that runs through all these activities is communication. Speakers try to exchange their ideas. For instance, language of power exists always in a concrete sociolinguistic context reflecting a social situation in a given time and place. Its official bureaucratic variety may be its dominant form. It as a whole remains an identifying feature of nationality.

Language is the pivot on which all human activities ranging from the most prosaic to the most profound revolve. It provides the unique medium through which the belief system, word view, moral values and virtually all the basic ingredients of any given society are passed from one generation to the other.

Language in political and social context

Language is very important in a society just as the society is important to language. One cannot easily study a language without a society. Language is basically social in nature. Considering a particular language, one can predict with certainty the social situations of a society. While social change naturally affects public speaking, it manifests itself mainly in the order of speech performance. Linguistic models appear and vanish, contribute to the creation of the space of public discourse, shape the everyday consciousness of the participants of a culture. They enter into daily life and shape the national identity also by participating in the popular culture, (Kloch, 265). Language as a whole remains an identifying feature of nationality, although to a smaller degree.

Language is essentially social in nature. It is an instrument of change. Those who attempt to introduce social change influence language which reacts to change slowly, (Kloch, 206). Change is difficult and the truth is that people change only when the perceptions and mental paradigms shift. A change in the external reality makes an imprint on language. Social transitions do not simply leave their reflection on the system of language or on styles of discourse. Some changes rapidly register transformations in social awareness.

Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise (Ranciere, 30). Politics correlates with strategic uses within the realm of performative character of language, aimed at changing mental states of subjects on the state of things of reality. Man frequently sees, listens, touches and feels things. But, when it comes to communicating such experiences, there are distortions and simplifications, which the chosen medium can hinder, quantitatively and qualitatively. In public statements people speak "against" someone or "for" themselves.

Mchihan (1971) cited by the de Oliveira (4) raises the idea of communication as an extension of man; his main argument is that "the medium is the message". He further observes that every technology imposes cognitive changes upon the individual. It is therefore, important to pursue how the individual can shape his or her world, his or her identity, his or her actions by contrasting them to the moral values put forth by the media. Where the result is isolation, indifference or hatred, then such identity is not enough for emancipated identity.

It is language which brings out the force of the politicians by the use of emotive words through the media. The politician is able to express himself and he is able to coordinate and

articulate by employing carefully selected words. The likelihood on the part of politicians to use language willfully to mislead is not an exception. It is indeed a norm, and what distinguishes political language from mere communication on free exchange is the element of deliberateness and manipulateness.

Language in the widest sense of the word means any means of communication (Encyclopedia Britannica, 659). It is a way of intellectually communicating thoughts and volitions such as command, wishes, prayers, implications. Language is an outlet of these feelings. It is one of the most potent forces in social life. The possession of common language is an extremely potent solidarity factor in all spiritual life and fosters feelings of fellowship and with political frontiers. Akwanya (8) is of the opinion that man has invented several systems of performing certain functions normally associated with language like transmitting information.

Language is itself an environmental tool. The community and government are usually bound together by a common set of language behaviour pattern. Denga (6) states that language is generally involved in all the higher mental processes such as thinking, reasoning and problem solving among others. This is to say that language plays an important role in the dissemination of ideas and information such as politics and propaganda. The propagandist for example manipulates all the elements of language such as words and phrases to indoctrinate a target populace. The preacher on the pulpit uses language to convert his congregation or even move them to the point of fanaticism. The politician on his part uses language as a weapon for winning over an opponent or the electorate. For him, language is a weapon for winning by which he can inflate public opinion or some political point.

It is language which brings out the force of the politicians by the use of emotive words through the print media. The politician is able to express himself as well as coordinate and articulate by employing carefully selected words. The use of emotive words as manifested in adjective and adverbs, figurative language such as metaphor and repetition and the use of proverbs, idioms by politicians are for special purpose. Leith cited by Mayer and Punch (147) states that language has a vital part to play in the exercise and consolidation of power. In political discourse meanings are manipulated and words chosen to lead the dice in favour of one's point of view.

Through language techniques, products, modes of social control and so on can be explained and the end results of anyone's inventiveness can be made available to anyone else with the intellectual ability to grasp what is being said. People live in social groups, learn and participate in the behaviour patterns of the society. The behaviour consists of interaction of human beings with one another and with the environment. Lyons (14) states that it is for the purpose of reliable communication at a distance and for the presentation of important legal, religious and commercial documents that writing was originally invented. This is another form of language for communication and transformation.

In a totalitarian political state, language degenerates into a power instrument. It becomes a means of storing knowledge in order to manipulate people in war and peace. All human thoughts that are experience becomes possible because of language. For Ashen and Nanda (342), language is the most important form of communication. It is a phoneme mingled with morpheme; morpheme with construct and construct with discourse. This continuum reaches from the one who speaks to the one who hears and finally to the entire speech community.

Problem of public communication in political context

Politics is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice. In this process, language plays a crucial role since every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language. According to Orwell, “All issues are political issue and politics itself is a mass of lie, eversions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the atmosphere is bad, language must suffer,” (525). The distinctive feature of every successful politician all over the world is his ability to communicate effectively. His goal is to convince the electorates to vote him into power using any means one of which is the manipulation of language.

Kloch (253) refers to the transformation in Poland after the fall of communism as a material for reflection and study of language in its relation to politics and social change. A change in the external reality makes an imprint on language. The difficulty lies in the rather slow pace of the change conditioned by many diverse factors. He further states that language and society complements and interprets each other. It is language that makes it possible for society to exist in a symbolic and real manner, facilitates articulation of needs and imaginings, group consolidation, and a sense of belonging. It contributes to creation of identity.

The language of power exists always in a concrete socio-linguistic context reflecting a social situation in a given time and place. Its official bureaucratic variety may be its dominant form. Citing Glowinski(2009), Kloch refers to the case of Russia from 17th to the early 19th century. In such cases, the system of social communication was being constructed from commands ‘what was permissible to say’ and ‘what was forbidden to say’. From the point of view of people in power, it was a coercive system and the only one possible. When this happens, the language of opportunity begins to leak into the realm of public speaking. It breaks communication monopoly and builds its own model of social communication.

Repressive language use manifests in the form of marginalization, manipulation, propaganda, offensive language use and abuse of power. Language, which has also been taken in common sense notion as discourse, refers to a form of language use or more generally the spoken language. It is taken as ways of speaking, (Van Dijk, 1). It has an overtly political agenda which shows inequality between the speaker and the hearer most often in terms of power relations, exposure, status, knowledge and social class. Therefore,

there is the likelihood to manipulate information on the part of the producer of the text for communication.

The dynamics of political language

Politician's speech fills a large area of public language, an area seen by all, propagated by the media. It creates a world of opposite values. The multitude of its variations is the result of social change. Human beings are essentially political animals whose political instincts are always manifesting in the choice and use of words. A conscious attempt must be made to critically assess the political undertone behind man's utterances. That language is a text or discourse simply means that language is a means by which people talk to each other. This talk in communication is not just by means of random sentences but by means of connected discourse which takes its meaning from the context of use.

People draw from the potentials of meaning in a cultural actual instance of meaning which serves their particular purpose. Politicians everywhere employ propaganda strategies to get or to retain power. Nothing is as political as this objective to reeducate using the discipline's own terms but with no devotion to particular words. If anything, the devotion is to individual's capacity of learning the function of many different set of words. Again, nothing should be more important to linguists than the continuous fight against every form of exclusion.

Conclusion

Language remains pre-dominant mode of communication whether in spoken or written form. It is not merely used for passing messages but is itself an integral part of social situations. It does not only reflect and reinforce meaning but, also records the history of civilization. Language is the mirror and aspiration of those who are liberated. One of the goals of language includes being of use in helping human kind to understand itself, become so self aware that it improves its ability to avoid disaster and to recognize its universality.

It mirrors society. Language as a whole remains an identifying feature of nationality. Social integration has language as one of its defining features. Language identifies affiliation. It assumes its basic fundamental functions towards society. What is at stake is the fostering of individuals in such a way that there would be, in a reasonably wide sense, the inclusion of practices and representations of the voices of groups not integrated to dominate the culture. This means the inclusion of the ones that are intellectually, economically, ideological or ethnically marginalized.

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