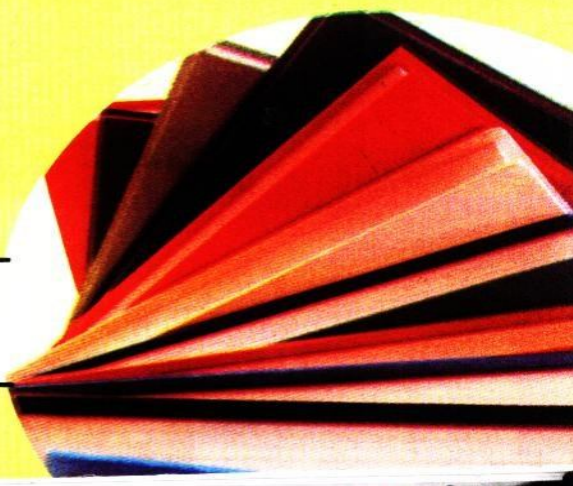


The Use of **ENGLISH** and **COMMUNICATION** **SKILLS**

For Tertiary Education



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Chapter One

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Patricia C. Dozie, Chinwe I. Ahumaraeze and Lovina Ujowundu

1.1 Introduction

Language and communication are two things that are important in man's existence and survival. They have, therefore, continued to attract attention and wide scholarship. Both concepts are also intrinsically connected because language gives life to communication. Language is fundamentally and purposefully communicative. Man employs the vehicle of language in disseminating information. People's thoughts, feelings, ideas, opinions and experiences are communicated to others via the use of language. Thus, every communication act is geared towards the transmission of information which flows from a source to a receiver through a channel using a medium. Effective communication requires that information also flows back from the receiver to the source using the same medium and channel in the form of feedback. For language to achieve its aim in communication, a language learner should understand the concept, its meaning and origin, its characteristics and functions

and the basic language skills so as to use language appropriately and effectively. A learner should also be able to draw a distinction between human language and animal communication. This chapter thus aims at teaching learners these basic things about language.

1.2 Meaning and Origins of Language

Language is a concept that is unarguably essential to man. This is because of the fact that man's existence depends solely on his ability to manipulate language to suit his purposes and communicative needs. Thus, language has continued to receive unabated attention and wide scholarship. Scholars over the years have thought about the meaning and origins of language and have come up with thought provoking arguments.

Language is first and foremost a set of linguistic signs that aids all social activities of man. It is a vehicle for thought expression. Language is equally viewed as a formal symbolic system that has rules of operation. This implies that language has rules and structure and, for anybody to produce sentences that are acceptable and correct he must adhere to these rules that govern use of language. When these rules are observed, the correct structure of the language is produced.

Language is basically a tool for communication. In communication, language performs social functions as it

is used to fashion out social interaction that enables humans to exchange information and co-habit. Again, language is viewed as a social phenomenon. It is communal and a heritage of not only one individual but of all the people who belong to a speech community (i.e. a group of people who live together and speak the same language).

Language is a concept that is highly connected to the mind. It is represented in the mind and characterizes the linguistic capability of individuals. Language scholars have noted that man is biologically adapted to use language as the human brain is carefully designed by God and is equipped with the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that gives children raised in a normal environment the ability to acquire, and by extension, use the language of that environment.

Language has been given various definitions by language scholars. Some of such definitions are considered here. "Language is an institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory symbols" (Halliday 1975:79). For Bloch and Trager (1942:7) "A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates". Edward Finegan (2008:22) defines language as "an arbitrary vocal system used by human beings to communicate with one another".

These definitions and views give meaning to language. In the main, language is a system of vocal symbols. It is arbitrary, communal, a vehicle for the exchange of information, a tool for communication, a social fact and a mental reality.

There have been speculations about the origin of language. Language scholars have thought of how this language that serves diverse purposes was developed and have come up with these postulations which some regard as sources of the origin of language while others regard them as theories. Some of the theories which have gained universal acceptability are considered subsequently.

1.2.1 The Divine Source

Yule (1996:1) has argued that there are divine sources to the origin of language. At creation, God himself used language and when he created Adam, he allowed Adam to name all other creatures (Gen 1, 2:19). At Babel also, God confounded the language of man and this resulted in the multiplicity of languages as seen in the world today.

1.2.2 The Natural Source

Language is believed to have evolved from natural sounds. The *bow-wow*, the *pooh-pooh* and the *yo-hey-ho* theories all support the fact that language

came from the imitation of natural sounds that people hear around them. The *bow-wow* theory states that language evolved as people tried to re-echo sounds that occurred naturally. This theory sees language as being onomatopoeic. Words like *buzz*, *boom*, *hiss*, and *meow* are all imitations of natural sounds. The theory however failed to account for words and expressions which are not linked to any natural sounds.

Language is also believed to have been developed from instinctive natural cries of emotions and other interjections. This is the tenet of the *pooh-pooh* theory. This theory holds that as people tried to express emotions of pain, anger and joy, language evolved. Words like *oh!*, *ah*, *ouch*, *wow*, *hey* and many others all express emotive feelings.

Another theory that draws from the belief that language has its origin in natural sounds is *Yo-he-ho* which holds that language began as rhythmic sounds and chants of people involved in heavy work. The people needed to communicate and coordinate their activities and social life. Thus, words like *strike*, *cut*, *ouch*, were used to call for assistance and cooperation in social situations and contexts.

1.2.3 The Hey You Theory

This is also known as the contact theory of the origin of language. The *Hey you* theory holds that

language evolved because of the need for contacts and interpersonal relationships. People needed to interact, introduce themselves and demand such introductions of self by other individuals. This theory was propounded by linguist Revesz who has it that expressions like *hey you! who are you?*, *hi* and others must have been the first expressions used by humans.

1.2.4 The Eureka Theory

This theory has it that language was consciously invented. As people had the need to fashion out cooperation and peaceful co-existence among them, language was invented. This explains why languages abound in the world. People who belong to the same geographical setting invented their own language and are thus of the same speech community. Thus, language is conventional because what people agree on is what language becomes for them.

1.2.5 The Oral Gesture Source

Language is believed to have evolved to accompany gestures which are quite insufficient in communication. The *Yo-h- ho* and *the Tata* theories draw extensively from this belief. The *Yo-he-ho* theory bestrides the natural sound and the oral gesture views of the origin of language. This theory holds that language which evolved from rhythmic sounds of people

involved in heavy work is also accompanied by gestures. People communicated their desires and coordinated their activities using vocal sounds as well as gestures. Words like *push*, *strike*, *hit* uttered during work is accompanied by gestures and visual signs indicating the actions solicited for.

Another theory that is traceable to the oral gesture view of the origin of language is the *Tata* theory propounded by Sir Richard Paget. According to this theory, language began as an unconscious imitation of bodily movement which preceded language. As gestures alone could not suffice in communicating complicated messages, language evolved as an accompaniment which helped information dissemination.

1.3 Characteristics of Language

Language is a complex, human specific system of communication. Language is said to be human specific because, of all the creatures of God, it is only man that has the capacity to use language. It is a tool in man's hand for the expression of emotions, ideas, thoughts and experiences. Language employs the vocal and auditory systems of man in its functioning. Language has an array of features that distinguish it from other forms of communication. These features are shared by all languages in the world and linguists have come to

term these features *linguistic or language universals*.

One important characteristic of language is that it is systematic. Every language is a system of sounds which combine to form higher units (syllables, words, phrases, clauses and sentences) in adherence to laid down rules. Language is a system better described in terms of units that can combine in a finite number of ways to form units that are higher. In the English language, for instance, discrete sounds combine to form syllables and words which in turn combine to form units higher than the word --- phrases, clauses and sentences.

sounds

/m/+/p/+/n/+/s/+/t/+/ə/

word

= monster

syllables

mon+ster

word

= monster

words

The+ugly+ monster + is+ eating + a+ fat+ toad = The ugly monster is eating a fat toad.

sentence

phrases

The ugly monster + is eating + a fat toad = The ugly monster is eating a fat toad.

clause/sentence

clauses

sentence

The ugly monster is eating a fat toad + which it killed
=The ugly monster is eating a fat toad which it killed.

The examples above illustrate the patterns of combination of smaller units into higher units and, by extension, highlights the notion *system* in the English Language.

Another important feature of language is discreteness. As has been noted and as can be deduced from the illustration given in the first feature discussed, languages are combinations of sounds. Sounds of a language are discrete and identifiable, thus the vocabulary of a language is made up of such discrete sounds. Each sound of a language is identifiable and different from another, thus sounds are distinctive. For instance, in the English words, *led*, *red*, *bed*, and *wed*, what accounts for their difference in meaning is the distinction in the first letter of each word. Thus, language can be seen as a system of contrast given that communication is possible because of the observed differences in the sounds produced.

Productivity is an indispensable characteristic of language. This feature gives language its creative ability. People who know a language very well have the capability of creating and producing new strings of utterances. What is important here is the knowledge and

adherence to the rule of grammar as language is highly rule-governed. This property gives language its openness as it provides the basis for the addition of new words into the lexicon of the language. Productivity makes for the growth and sustenance of language because it is the basis for man's ability to generate new sentences and understand utterances heard for the first time. Language can be used in a couple of ways for specific effects, as is evident in the different uses of the word "book".

Book my flight.

My book has torn.

I need a book case

The word "book" performs different functions in the three sentences. It is traditionally a noun which function it performs in the second sentence. In the first and third sentences, it has been assigned different functions: verb and adjective respectively. Thus, productivity makes it possible to change the part of speech of the word "book" from noun to verb and adjective as is seen in the illustrations.

Dynamism is another important feature of language. Language changes and grows as it adapts to new environments and different users. Lexical items are constantly being modified as new ones are added or the meaning of old ones extended. Words sometimes get into a language from another language through the

process of borrowing or loan translation. A typical example of the dynamic nature of language is neologism which involves the invention of new words or expressions to take care of advances in science and technology.

Worth pointing out is the dual nature of language. The feature shows that language operates on two levels: form and meaning. Language is structured into patterns and at the same time meaningful. In language use, there is always the form (physical property) of a word and what it stands for (means). Looking at the concept of duality, one finds out that each sound or word produced in a language is linked to a fact of human life; thus, languages have structure that meaning resides in. The dual nature of language also stipulates that for structures to be meaningful, they must adhere to the rules of the language since language is basically rule- governed.

Examples

Time flies.

Mary loves the garden.

These two sentences are meaningful because of their adherence to the rules of grammar. Violation of structure results in constructions that are devoid of meaning as is evident in the sentences below.

- Flies time.
- The garden loves Mary.

These constructions lack meaning because of non-adherence to rules.

Arbitrariness is a basic attribute of language. The concept of arbitrariness in language means that there is no logical relationship between a word (structure and sound) and what it stands for (meaning). This implies that the form/structure of words and their meanings are not necessarily connected. Nothing links directly the nature of the things or ideas denoted by a language and the linguistic units that are used to express them. The symbol/word "dog" refers to a creature; yet there is nothing in it that indicates or resembles that name. This also points to the fact that meaning is not deciphered from the internal make-up of words.

Because of the concept of arbitrariness (that is, there is no logical connection between a word and what it stands for/means), people in various speech communities agree on terms to be used to denote things, ideas and concepts. This brings us to the concept of conventionality. Conventionality, as an attribute of language, indicates that words and symbols arise by way of social contact as language itself is a social construct. Because there is no natural connection between a language symbol and what it represents, there is an agreement by people using a particular language to use a particular word to denote one thing or the other. Thus, names of people, things, objects, ideas

and concepts are matters of convention and agreement among users.

Infallibility is another essential property of language. This property states that language is unbounded in scope. Though language is rule-governed, there is no limit to the uses language is put to. Adhering to the rules of language, language users control the language system and manipulate it to suit their situations and purposes.

Displacement is another attribute of language and it enables language users to talk about things in the abstract. This implies that it allows individuals to talk about things and events not present. Using the vehicle of language, man can refer to past and future actions and times and talk about places man has not been to or seen before.

Language is culturally transmitted. Man is genetically predisposed to speak and he learns to do so as a member of a particular culture. This language learnt is also passed on from one generation to the other. These are the basic and essential properties of language that imbue language with its rich uniqueness.

1.4 Functions of Language in Communication

Man uses language for communication, social interaction, construction and execution of development plans. This implies that human beings invented

language for communication to co-ordinate all activities of man in society. Thus, man puts his language to varying degrees of use as discussed below.

Three major functions of language have been identified. One great language scholar named Halliday (1978) called these *metafunctions*. These metafunctions are ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational function of language is a situation where language is used to represent concrete ideas in the world, for example, when we use language to pass information to others about things around us. The inter-personal function of language is the use of language in social and interpersonal interactions such as in asking questions, greetings and conversations generally. Here, we use language to maintain good social relationship with one another and interact with other people. We express our personal feelings and intentions to other people. The textual function is the way language is used to link ideas in a text within a particular context. For example, we use language to produce coherent and understandable essays, when writing, and speeches, when talking to others. Sentences are logically presented and linked to one another through the use of appropriate language resources, such as transitional expressions. These Metafunctions are the bricks from which other uses of language are drawn.

Language performs transactional and interactional

functions. The transactional functional of language is seen when language expresses content; that is, use of language to convey messages. This is almost the same as the ideational function of language mentioned above. The interactional function focuses on the expression of social relations and personal attitudes, as is the case with the interpersonal function of language given above.

Language is basically essential in the transmission and propagation of culture. What people know as culture survives and is passed from one generation to the other because such find expression in language. Parents teach their children, who are expected to teach the upcoming generation, social norms, behavioral patterns, belief systems, customs and rules via the use of language. Thus, language serves as a binding string between people who use and understand a particular language. It gives them an identity.

Language also performs referential functions. This happens when language is employed to communicate information about something. Language is used to make reference to issues, things and ideas. This function gives language users the enablement to name subjects and trace issues about or conditions of such subjects named.

Phatic communication is another function of language. Here, language functions essentially as a

social regulator. It helps to initiate, nurture and sustain friendly relationships and peaceful co-existence of individuals in the society. Phatic communication includes exchange of pleasantries and greetings which are indications of peaceful co-existence between and among people. An example of phatic communication is the usual greetings when we meet people: *good morning, how do you do?*

Man also uses the medium of language in performing affective functions. This implies that man knows the impact language can have and thus tries to use language politely and appropriately. Formal settings call for formal choice of words. Individuals are to be addressed politely and appropriately for them to bring out the best in them.

Language also functions to sustain development. It is a social action which creates a conducive environment for participatory development since it serves as a vehicle for sharing development news and information that are capable of transforming and modifying attitudes and behaviours.

Basically, language functions as the only medium of communication, thought and self-expression. People express their thoughts and views about issues of life through language. Thus, language is the oil that greases the rotational wheels of society without which life is not livable and possible.

1.5 Animal Communication

Of all the creatures in the world, it is only man that uses language. Thus, language is seen as a system of communication that is peculiar to man. Animals, on the other hand, are able to communicate with one another. Communication among animals is also highly specie-specific (that is, every animal has communication patterns natural to that particular kind of animal). Communication in animals involves the use of signs selected from a small range that is innate. All species of animals can communicate by signaling emotions like fear or danger using an elaborate and developed system. Such system of communication has limited range of meaning; thus, animal communication lacks spontaneity and creativity, that are basic and non-negotiable attributes of human language.

Finegan (2008:20) has noted that a dog can communicate displeasure or aggression. This is done through the display of fangs which signals its readiness to bite. Other animals with some kind of fixed signals for communications are the birds. Birds have vocalized and non-vocalized systems of communication. Vocalizations in birds are of two types: calls and songs. Whistles and chirps of birds consist of few syllables and are mainly used as alarm or food signals indicating the source and location of food. Such calls also signal flocking. Songs are also a more complex sequence of sound units used

by males for two reasons: to attract a mate and to mark off territories.

Dolphins also have a system of communication that uses two types of vocalization: pure tones (whistles and squeaks) and pulsed sounds (barks, moans). Dolphins can whistle to set out alarms or distress calls.

Monkeys are also specific in their system of communication. They use three types of signals in communication: vocalization, facial expression and posture, and all these signal one thing or the other. Bodily displays like head bobbing are used in the display of threats. Glancing on and off another signals subordination while penile display indicates territory demarcation. McGregor (2009:29) postulates that vervet monkeys also use a system of communication that include twenty different vocalized sound systems which include alarm calls for warning, high pitched chutters that tell others of the presence of snakes, chirps warning about leopards, and low pitched chatter that expresses aggression.

Bees have an elaborate system of communication. They perform two types of dances to indicate the presence and position of nectar. A round dance signifies that the source of nectar is close to the hive. Wagging tail dance signifies that the source of nectar is afar off. Speed and rhythm of dance all tell something about the source of nectar.

Communication in ape is highly gestural. They use gestures to draw attention to themselves. When an action is desired, the apes use a stylized gesture to indicate this. A child that desires to climb its mother's back briefly touches her on the top of the rear end.

Animal communication is quite distinct from language and human communication. Animals send messages across to their kind using signals which are fixed and which lack the properties of human language. The next section will make more explicit these distinctions between human language and animal communication.

1.6 Human Language / Animal Communication

Communication involves the exchange of information between creatures of a kind. In a communication process, message/information is transmitted from a sender to a receiver that is expected to decode and react to such information. In the transmission of information, humans use language as a medium while animals employ the use of signals. As has been established in the preceding section, human language is quite distinct from animal communication. In the main, language is human specific. This is because humans alone have the biological basis to produce speech. So while human language is vocal and auditory, animal communication is highly gestural with limited

vocality.

Human language has properties that are lacking in animal communication. Although animal communication seems to embody some of the properties of human language, it does so in a very little way.

Language is learnt. When a child is born, he begins to acquire and learn the language of his environment through constant exposure to that language. Animals communicate using signs that are inborn. A cat in Africa and one in Asia would make the same sounds but children born into speech communities in these continents would never speak the same language unless they learn such later in life.

Language is the vehicle for cultural transmission. Norms and belief systems are kept alive through language. Linguists believe that birds learn some of their songs while some are innate. To this effect, knowledge is handed from one generation to the other and this suggests cultural transmission at its barest limit.

Reflexivity is a property of language that enables language users to convey information about themselves. A language user can talk about his life, wants, experiences and aspirations. This is not peculiar to animal communication as they used fixed signal that are not open to change/transformation. Human language is organised in patterns of structure which is

vocality.

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not present in animal communication. Again, as human language is timeless and not limited, animal communication can only indicate the present as is seen in the ability of bees to communicate the location of nectar at the moment.

Human language makes use of discrete sounds in communication. Animal communication does not make use of identifiable sound systems. The sounds of animal are continuous and lack boundary thus, they are not discrete.

Human language is highly arbitrary given that there is no logical connect between form and meaning. Although there are words that are imitations of sounds, words do not resemble what they refer to. The linguistic sign "tortoise" is not in any way connected to the object it refers to in terms of its attributes. In animal communications, signs are fixed. Some are produced to indicate danger, some to solicit for attention while some are food signals. These signals are highly linked to the messages they convey.

Language is highly productive and creative. Language users can make new meanings by producing new expressions and utterances. Knowledge and mastery of the rules of the language equip one with the power of creativity that enables one recreate the world. When the need arises, one out of spontaneity draws from one's knowledge base to communicate. In

contrast, animal communication lacks spontaneity, productivity and creativity as animals operate using a fixed system that is closed. Animal communication is bound in scope. There is a limit to what can be communicated and the length of the communication process. This is in contrast to human language that is not limited as language users control language and manipulate it to suite their communication needs any time. This is lacking in animal communication.

From what we have seen so far, it is obvious that there is a wide gulf between human language and animal communication. Language is strictly human and it is one factor that makes man distinct from other creatures. Man uses language in a limitless number of ways to communicate with his peers. Language comes in form of speech, writing or even signs that could be modified depending on situations and contexts. Animal communication is fixed and limited and convey one message or another which, when exhausted, communication becomes impossible.

1.7 The Basic Language Skills

In every learning activity, knowledge of skill is essential and becomes a facility in the learning process. There are basic skills needed in language teaching and learning. Mastery of these skills aids learning tremendously. The basic language skills are listening,

speaking, reading and writing. The four language skills are related. Some are productive skills while others are receptive skills. Also, some are oral while others are written.

Listening and reading skills are considered to be receptive skills given that when one listens or reads, one takes in or receives new information from people but one who speaks and writes produces or outputs what others will consume. Again, listening and speaking are connected by their mode of production as both are spoken or oral. Reading and writing share the same mode; they are both written. One reads only what has been penned down and one who writes communicates using the written mode. These four language skills are essential given that language proficiency is dependent on their mastery.

Class Activity: Do the exercises in Chapter One of the workbook.

