

## A Study of Language Function from the Perspective of Modern Linguistics

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**Abstract:** Language is not only a tool for human communication, but also an unbridgeable gap between other animals and human beings. It is related to human society, culture, ecology, science and other fields. In view of this, through the research methods of modern linguistics, this paper mainly analyzes and discusses the function of language, and at the same time involves the problems and relationships between language and society, ecology, culture, language acquisition and other aspects. The author concludes that there are interdependent and mutually restrictive relationships between language and meaning, language and human society, language and ecology, language and culture, and language and acquisition.

### 1. Introduction

The study of language generally has two aspects: one is the study of the sound, form and meaning of language; the other is the interdisciplinary study of language and other related disciplines[1]. In terms of language research, predecessors have done a lot of research on these two aspects, and have achieved fruitful results. Language is established with human society and develops with the development of human society. It can be seen that language and human society are interrelated, mutually promoting and interdependent. Therefore, we must study and observe language and human society simultaneously. So far, many scholars have discussed the necessity of language study from the macro level of linguistics, ecolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and psycholinguistics and so on, and put forward many viewpoints and measures. This paper will also discuss the function of language from the perspective of modern linguistics, mainly involving language and meaning, language and human society, language and ecology, language and culture, language and acquisition.

### 2. Language and Meaning

In people's general subconscious, language is an indispensable and important part of our daily life. Almost all human psychological changes and behavioral activities are related to language, and all kinds of social relations involve language. Language is a tool of communication between people. In other words, language is a communicative symbol system, which is established by convention. By following its rules and principles, people can communicate with each other. Darwin regarded language as "the instinctive tendency to master an art", while William James regarded language and thought as human instincts. Chomsky's theory of "universal grammar" is the most famous assertion about the language instinct in the 20th century[2]. Language itself has no meaning. Meaning is shaped and socialized by the communicative function endowed by people. Saussure challenged the traditional view of mirror language in the 20th century. Before the 20th century, people generally accepted the view of context language. Language is a mirror reflecting the reality of nature. Saussure proposed and developed the view of structural language, put forward the principle of meaning and arbitrariness, and challenged the traditional theory of language and meaning. He

believes that language is not only a manifestation but also a structure. It is a language system composed of the relationship between formal signs and meanings. That is to say, language is a structure. In ancient Indian philosophy, “the ear knows what it hears” is the embody of “the place of sound”, and meaning that all sounds heard by the ear are called sounds. In general, the fundamental aspects of the classification of sounds can be divided into two types: those produced by the grasping species and those produced by the non-grasping species, meaning whether the root is grasping or not. And since to the sound itself, it is not held by the root, by grasping or non-grasping it here means whether the sound is held by the root or not. Such as, the sound of the man’s language, and the sound of water. The former has the function of expressing meaning, while the latter has no practical function of meaning. The most basic of these is that language is a uniquely human tool for communication. After we observe the relationship and characteristics between language and meaning from the perspective of western linguists and ancient Indian homology, it is obvious that language and meaning have a very close relationship. A language is a system, a system of symbols. Human beings use a large number of symbol systems, language is one of them. Language is a symbol system. “Symbol” means “related to meaning”. Therefore, language symbol system is the process of meaning generation and exchange, also an indispensable and important part in the field of language research.

### 3. Language and Human Society

Language originates from labor, and labor determines the need to create language. In the early primitive period, human beings chose to work in groups in order to survive, forming the human society. For example, in the hunting operation, human beings have to coordinate with each other, cooperate with each other, rely on each other and exchange information in order to survive, which must be transmitted through certain ways. With the social group in the process of labor, language gradually produced. In 1950, Stalin put forward the sociality of language in *Marxism and Linguistics*, believing that language is a social phenomenon. Language has a close relationship with human society. It comes into being with the emergence of society and develops with its development. From the day of its emergence, language has become a link to maintain the survival and development of human society. Every member of the human society has a precious resource to enjoy alone --- language. Language is a precious resource to be inherited, protected, developed and utilized from generation to generation with the reproduction of human beings. Language is a priceless treasure to human society. Edward Sapir, a famous American linguist, said, “Language is the most meaningful and greatest work created by the human spirit --- a form of completion that expresses everything and allows for the exchange of experience[3]”. That is to say, it is a means of communication for everything that human beings express. Therefore, language is as closely related to human society as fish is to water.

In many cases, the contradictions within a social group are diverse, comprehensive and complex. This phenomenon is often recognized by others, elicited by their reactions, and systematically described by people from all walks of life, but the main problem goes far beyond mere words and involves behavioral aspects as well. Language is not only the main tool of social communication, but also the main symbol reflecting social phenomena. Language is rooted in social communication, and social groups communicate and coordinate with each other through language. As we all know, language is a characteristic of human society. Every normal person has mastered a language in childhood, that is, his mother tongue, the 1<sup>st</sup> language. The prerequisite for mastering the mother tongue is the social group, which enables him to learn the basic pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical structure of his mother tongue in his or her childhood. When people acquire their first language, we can see that they don’t need to learn it on purpose, and they don’t need their parents’ guidance, which is completely different from the process of learning a foreign language. This indicates that the 1<sup>st</sup> language has a direct relationship with the linguistic environment of the social group. The great function and scope of language can be seen in every corner of human social life. Language acts as an incredible social glue and is a huge driving force for the harmonious development of human society. We can understand the rich knowledge and experience of human

society and pass it on to the next generation through language. Therefore, language occupies a special position to some extent. Language research is not only the study of human society, but also the service of human society. The continuous development of human society cannot be separated from the support of language.

#### **4. Language and Ecology**

In today's society, "ecology" is the focus that people pay the most attention to. It is a word that is frequently used in daily life. *The Modern Chinese Dictionary* interprets the word "ecology" as "a state of existence and development of organisms in a certain natural environment, as well as physiological properties and living habits of organisms[4]". In this definition, we can see several key words: first, biology; second, the natural environment; the third is the biology itself physiology and the life habit. These three points constitute the basic points of "ecology". Then, what is the relationship between ecology and language? Language is always in the natural ecological environment, and various languages have certain changes in the ecological environment. These changes have both external and internal factors, and internal changes are the main factors. For example, human ideology, communication, social environment and other factors often participate in the dynamic evolution of language and become the main reason for language evolution. In other words, language is always in the process of communication between man and nature, between man and culture, between man and society, and between man and mankind. Language is a complex ecosystem. Therefore, to observe language from the ecological perspective is also a point of view to expand language research.

As for the ecological problems of language, some scholars attribute them to the following eight aspects: (1) The inequality between language and language is becoming more and more serious; (2) Endangered languages deserve attention; (3) Language pollution still exists; (4) Harm to language power occurs from time to time; (5) The mixed use of code brings new problems affecting the ecological environment of language; (6) Social problems caused by language competition attract people's attention; (7) One-sided treatment of Mandarin and dialect; (8) Weak awareness of language norms[5]. In our opinion, the main ecological problem faced by national languages is that many national languages are endangered. This problem directly leads to the threat of linguistic diversity and the change of linguistic ecological environment. The languages of different nations all express their own world outlook and values. Once a nation's language dies, its spirit and culture will also die out. The most important task of linguists today is to carry out fieldwork to describe these dying languages on the ground.

In the field of linguistics, many scholars have put forward many opinions and measures for the protection of different languages, mainly for the linguistic minorities. Language protection has three aspects: language resources, language ecology and language rights. Language resources are precious resources shared by all human beings, which can help improve the continuous development of human society. The best way to protect language for language users is to develop and utilize language resources continuously. In order to protect language resources, we must establish a good language ecological environment, raise the whole society's attention to endangered languages, understand the serious consequences caused by endangered languages, and immediately enable linguists to describe the language on the spot, revive the language, and create a good language ecological environment. The key to protecting and inheriting language ecology lies in the right to use and develop language, and the right to use vulnerable languages is protected according to law. Language resources, language ecology and language rights are both interrelated and differentiated.

#### **5. Language and Culture**

The history of human civilization shows that developed cultures are open, receptive and inclusive and tend to be progressive, while backward cultures are closed, simple and exclusive. Without the clash of civilizations and the prosperity of cultures, there would be no strong

civilization. Strong civilization promotes the economic and cultural development of the whole country and the nation and brings about a huge impact. The development and extinction of any language has a great relationship with its cultural background and connotation. The differences in cultural deposits lead to the differences in language usage habits. The two are complementary to each other and promote development together. Culture is a very broad and intriguing concept. To put it simply, culture is the general name of the living elements of regional human beings. Sociologists and anthropologists believe that culture contains different factors such as beliefs, habits, thoughts, values and systems in specific countries and contexts. It has important influences on the expression of language vocabulary, representation of meaning and interpretation of artistic conception, and is an indispensable part in the formation and application of language[6].

As a subject culture, language is a part of culture. As a carrier of culture, it has the function of carrying other cultural information. Language refers to human nature or nationality, and the base of all cultures or civilizations. The evolution and development of language are closely related to the evolution and development of social culture. Language epic is a part of the broad cultural history or civilization history, and the language history of a nation is the reflection and accumulation of this national cultural history or civilization history. Therefore, the history of the formation and evolution of a language is parallel to the history of the formation and evolution of a nation[7]. There is a mutually promoting relationship between language and culture. Language is the dancer played by culture, and culture is the stage on which language is displayed. Throughout history, language and culture have always been inseparable, complementary and mutually promoting development. Language is the carrier supporting cultural communication and development, while culture has endowed languages with different connotations. Through the connection of language and culture, people can deepen their understanding and digestion of different languages. The cultural researcher of a nation should first start from its language and obtain more information resources through language. Language is a window for understanding a nation and culture. The development of any language is directly related to its special cultural background and connotation. Language is an indispensable part in the formation and development of culture, and also a carrier to support the transmission and development of culture

## **6. Language Acquisition**

Language acquisition refers to the process of human learning, acquiring and mastering language in childhood[8]. Language acquisition mainly studies how humans learn language and acquire language, as well as the process and method of language learning. Languages are not born, they are learned. Language acquisition is also the main sign of the difference between human beings and other animals as well as a necessary condition for interpersonal communication. The theory of language acquisition is formed by the development of the discipline of psychology, and the theory of learning is derived from philosophy. Of course, all disciplines are based on philosophy. With the development of psychology, the study of language acquisition theory has made a breakthrough.

Language acquisition is a complex phenomenon and many scholars have put forward many new theories in this field. It is well known that there are several typical theories of innate energy, environment and cognition. Chomsky believed that human beings have innate language ability, that is, the innate ability to learn language in the brain. On the contrary, environmentalism and nature theory hold that human language ability comes from acquired learning, and environment plays an important role in human language learning. Cognitive theory holds that cognitive structure is the basis of language development and changes with the age of infants. Electroencephalograph is a common measurement and analysis method, which amplifies and records the weak bioelectricity of the brain. Scholars have different views and theoretical systems on the theory of language acquisition. Due to the different academic backgrounds of researchers, the research methods and results are also different. For example, neuroscience research has isolated parts of the brain that process spoken and spoken language: the left inferior frontal gyrus (Broca's area) and the left posterior central gyrus (Wernicke's area) (Fox, 2007). These regions are mainly responsible for the basic language function (Broca's area) and semantic processing (Wernicke's area) (OECD, 2007)[9].

To verify the activity of language in the brain and the characteristics of acquired language from a scientific perspective, many scholars have found that the production of language is closely related to Broca's area in man's brain.

In general, the first step for everyone is to master the language in which they were born, which is commonly known as their mother tongue. The language learned in order to interact with other peoples is called the 2<sup>nd</sup> language. Even people master the 3<sup>rd</sup> language. Children's language acquisition cannot be separated from their growing environment, and the social environment has a great influence on children's language acquisition. Most children learn about the world under the guidance of their parents or grandparents. At the beginning of early childhood education, more and more words are mastered under the guidance of their teachers and under the learning environment. Language acquisition is closely related to children's physical and mental health. From the perspective of growth environment, children will acquire the language in the language environment they live in. For example, Tibetan children living in the Chinese language environment will acquire Chinese in order to communicate with each other. Among the theoretical methods mentioned above, the most practical one is the environmental theory. Different language environments and cultures will restrict the ways and methods of children's language acquisition. Therefore, when children of different nationalities acquire language, they should acquire it according to their mother tongue environment. Otherwise, it will affect their future mother tongue expression.

## 7. Conclusion

From the development process of language, we can see that language is not only a tool for human communication, but also related to human society, culture, ecology, science and other fields. From the perspective of language research, language cannot be separated from human society or groups, cultural background and ecological environment. So far, there are two main levels of language research. One is the study of the sound, form and meaning of language. The other is the interdisciplinary study of language and other related disciplines. With the perspective of language research, language research can break out of the closed system of language structure and expand to more disciplines. Language research is the foundation for building a harmonious human society with strong culture, ecological balance and advanced science and technology, which can fundamentally promote the service ability of language.

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