

Subject name: Language and Society
Prof. name: Prof.Rajesh Kumar
Department: Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Institute name: IIT Madras
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Today we will examine terms like languages, dialects, and varieties for understanding relationship between language and society. We have looked at language in details and on the basis of our understanding of language, we will examine the term dialects. So far we have also tried to make an attempt to understand varieties and a relationship between language and variety. We will look at these terms afresh in a moment.

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Language

- Language is innate human capacity.
- It is a fully structured system.
- Language defines humans.
- It is used in society.
- The rules of language use are systematic as well.
- It is both individual as well as social entity.



What we find from our discussion so far on language is the following: language is an innate human capacity. We have established that in the sense that, it is natural and it is normal unavoidable automatic capacity. It grows in us, we do not opt to learn a language. We have no choice but to learn language while growing up. The underlying system of language gets unfolded and human mind works on it in a very subconscious way and the entire process is very subconscious for the cognitive understanding of this capacity.

In short, language is an innate human capacity. It is a capacity - it develop in us. It is fully structured system. It has structure all levels like sounds, words, sentences and discourse. Each one of these levels are relevant for independent study and understanding but in the connection of understanding the relationship between language and society, we will be looking at this whole,

the relationship between sounds, words and sentences together. And this is what we mean when we say language defines human. We do not use language and its part independent of one and another. The whole system when becomes external of individual and in such a case it defines humans. It is used in society and the rules of language use are very systematic as well in the same sense as we say language is structured. Language happens to be both individual as well as social entity. Language as phenomena remains individual as long as we are looking at the individual components - several modules of language like sounds , words, sentences and when we are looking at the internal development of language and how human mind interact with such a development and how it functions as a catalyst, how it allow language to grow within and things related to that. Such a thing is part of language which make it as individual's phenomena.

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The moment it becomes out of individual, that is, it becomes articulated, when we - in the simplest term, the moment, when we speak - it becomes a social entity. And it is important and crucial for us to look at this part, to see the distinction between language as a cognitive phenomena, language as a phenomena of human mind, language as a product of human mind viz a viz language as social phenomena and in order to understand what we mean by rules of language use, we need to see the distinction between these two things and rules of language use become apparent only when we consider language as social entity.

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- Grammaticality vs. Acceptability
- A sentence is possible out of its social context but it will remain unacceptable.
- 'A colorless green ideas sleep furiously.'
- Acceptability is governed by social rules.
 - Examples
 - Use of second person pronouns in Hindi.



Similarly, there are few terms and ideas that we would like to understand for clearer understanding for the relationship between language and society we keep using these terms many a times which are relevant for such an understanding.

Let's look at the first one - the term grammaticality versus acceptability. Sentence have to be grammatical and when we say, sentence is grammatical, we primarily refer to rules of language. However the acceptability depends on the rules of language use. This is why we can say a sentence is possible out of its social context, but it will remain unacceptable. Let us look at the sentence – a very famous sentence in the understanding of language used several times - A colourless green idea sleep furiously.

Or, we can say, colourless green ideas sleep furiously. What happens in such a sentence is that this sentence does not have its total meaning. This sentence doesn't mean anything. However it is totally grammatical. This sentence is grammatically viable. It is not violate any rules of language and comes up as a perfectly grammatical normal sentence.

However, this is not acceptable because it is out of the social context. It doesn't mean anything in the real world. Also there could be several sentence which will be, which will remain out of their context. For example, let us look at three sentences in a row. The President is the head of the Constitution; Taj Mahal is in Agra; and Washington D.C. is the capital of the United States. If we say these three sentences one after the other, each one these sentences is grammatical, independent of the social context.

However, in the social context, which makes it discourse, these sentences remain unacceptable. And here by unacceptability we only mean out of discourse, out of social context. We are trying to bring in idea that acceptability, the idea of acceptability in language is governed by social rules. And we will look at some of the examples of these social rules, in particular the use of second person pronoun before we want to understand society and identity. And here is what I want you to understand about the rules of language use.

See, there are three terms for second person pronoun in Hindi. These terms are “ aap”, “tum”, and “tu”. They are all “you” which is second person pronoun. Now, what I really mean is, we will we will number them one, two and three. The use of these three is context-dependent. Each Speakers of Hindi, they know where they need to use “aap”, where they need to use “tum”, and where they need to use “tu”. The use of one in a different context would make the whole context unacceptable.

So let us look at where they are used. The one “aap” will be used in the context where we are addressing senior people, elderly people, and unknown people, that also contains elements of formality. Whereas the use of two, that is “tum” is dependent on familiarity, totally familiar people, and reduced level of formality. Friends, people of the same age group and so on. However the third one is used in a total familiar context. So totally familiar, familiar and formal - that will be the hierarchy in use of this thing – in the use of the second person pronoun.

So the use of one in the other context will make it unacceptable. And here is an example that I can quote, that I can give you to understand, to make the point clearer. See, this, number two, “tum” as I mentioned can also be used for the people of the same group.

However this is not totally, that rule does not apply all the time. You can use term “tum” for the people of the same age group. When the level of formality is reduced and they the group of speakers, that is, the speaker and hearer are familiar with one and other. If the hearer is not familiar and still from same group, this will not be used. What comes in is this.

So the formality, the level of formality takes precedence over the use among same group people, the condition for the use among the same group people. At the same time, the term “aap” can also be used for people of, people of a younger age group and again the same condition would

apply when the speaker is not familiar with the hearer. So the level of formality gets precedence and familiarity takes precedence over where this can be used.

That is the use of second person pronoun for “you” in Hindi where they have three different forms. Now the point is, again to retaliate, the use of one in the other context will lead to unacceptability. And sometimes there is a hairline distinction between unacceptability and ungrammaticality, But largely unacceptability is governed by the rules of language use, governed by the rules of social condition, social context. Alright.

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Society

- For the purpose of the study of language, a group of at least two person with no upper limit may constitute society.
- A group drawn together for a purpose.

Identity

- Identity is a linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories. (Kroskrity 2000)
- It is not preconceived as male or female; it is a nuanced way of referencing.



The next part which we want to understand to look at such things in greater details for further understanding for the relationship in society. We want to begin with the term ‘society’. A society can be a complex idea to define. However, for the purpose of study of language, we have tried to make it simpler. And the term society can be identified, can be defined as a group. However, the group could be as small as two person with no upper limit on the number of participants in the group. So a group for a particular purpose would define society.

So how does this translate into the context of the study of language and society? When we use the language in the society we need at least two people in the group and even though there is nothing visibly common between the two which form the group, here is what will be common: the two people who are interacting with one another, they are interacting for the purpose of interaction. The interaction itself becomes the purpose. And for that, with that in mind, it can still be defined society for the understanding of the term in the context of the study of language and society.

That will be very micro level definition of society. There are various definitions of society available in the larger domain of the study of sociology. And we will stay away from that, for the time being. So to conclude this we can say, a group drawn together for a purpose is called 'society'. The term 'identity' is also relevant for understanding of language and society. Identity is the linguistic construction of the members in one or more social group or categories. It is not a preconceived idea.

The term identity is not like male or female. It is a nuanced way for referencing. So identities are constructed, identities depend on several parts, and why we want to understand this terms because language happens to be one of the strongest marker for construction of identity. We will be looking at these also in details.
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Speech Community

Individuals who linguistically behave alike
speak the same language/dialect/variety.

Individuals who observe same linguistic
norms.

Individuals may belong to MANY speech
communities.



Another term which is going to be used several times is 'speech community'. And this is interesting in the context of understanding of society. Individuals who linguistically behave alike,

speak the same language or the dialect or variety. We are using the three terms at this time without making any distinction between them. So individuals who behave alike linguistically

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- and it simply means the individuals who speak alike, or who we perceive speaking alike - will form speech community, will speak the same language and will form speech community. Again just like the definition of society, defining speech community is going to be complex. It is already too complex. There are several definitions of speech community available. We are not going into the details at this point. However, do invite you to look into elementary introductory book on speech, on social linguistic, to see how term speech community has been defined. My idea is to generate your interest in these terms so that you develop a better understanding. However we will be using these things, these terms only to understand several other ideas later. So, the other thing that we can add to the understanding of speech community is also individual who observe same linguistic norms are also going to be part of this speech community.

And what becomes even more interesting is to include the idea in understanding speech community that individuals may belong to many speech communities at a time, and one individual may be members, member of many speech communities. And here is how we understand. An individual speaks different types of language if the individual shares a different type of identities and therefore the use of language in various different context would also constitute speech communities.

Take for example, somebody speaking Hindi or Tamil - they become the member of Tamil speech community. If that individual, if an individual is Tamil speaker becoming the member of Tamil speech community. If the individual also speaks English, immediately the same individual becomes the member of the English speaking community as well.

If that individual is a student then the student becomes the member of speech community which is constituted with the students of the same type. And if the same individual is a singer or a player, then that individual becomes the member of yet another speech community. Therefore it is possible to, for an individual to belong to many a speech communities.

And therefore for each term like speech community, identity and society we said it is difficult to define them because there is no one way to look at these terms. We are looking at these terms from the perspective of understanding language and its relationship with society.

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Some Domains of language use/function

- Family
- Friends
- Community
- Business
- Religion
- Government
- Media
- Education



Here are some of the domains of language use that we would need to keep in mind. So every time we are going to be using terms like ‘domains of language use’ or ‘domains of language function’, here are the things we can keep in mind. The family happens to be primarily domain for language use. Friends is yet another domains of language use and the language used in family is going to be strikingly different from the language used among friends. The use of language in community, the use of language for the purpose of business are among business communities. The use language in the context of religion, the use of language in the context of government’s functioning, media, and finally education.

Each one these however the list is not restricted only to these domains. These could be many more such domains of the language used. However, these are few examples where we want to understand the meaning of the ‘domain of language use’.

Now we come to the term dialect.
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Dialect

- Socially loaded term
- Superficiality of the distinction
 - All natural languages that people speak are acquired in the same manner; then how could one be language and the other, dialect?
- A famous quote:
 - A language is dialect with an army and navy.



And we would like to understand the distinction between language and dialect. We would at least begin this discussion and would want to understand this with simplicity at least.

The term dialect is, at least to introduce the term and to be fair with the term, is a very socially loaded term. It could also be politically loaded. It means different things. In the context of the understanding of language, there is absolutely no distinction between the two terms language and the dialect. Therefore I am talking about, I am also going to be talking about superficiality of the

distinction with the idea that all the natural languages that people speak are acquired in same manner.

I invite you to look at the acquisition of language and the parameters involved in acquisition of language with great details. And then come to an understanding of how language is acquired in details. Once you have finished doing that you will realize that all the languages are acquired in the same way. All the languages are acquired with the same technicality, with the same parameters.

Then how could one be language and other is dialect? What could be the technical or technically grounded linguistic basis for defining language and dialect? This is the reason when we evaluate the terms language and dialect on the basis of acquisition of language we come to the conclusion of superficiality in making such a distinction.

Now, if you examine what I have just said about dialect so far, then you can hear some contradictions. I am saying both. What I am saying is, making an attempt to make a distinction between language and dialect is superficial. However I am also saying dialect is a socially and politically loaded term. But we need to understand this in the context of study of language for the purpose of technical study of language, for the purpose of technical understanding of language there is no distinction between language and dialect.

They are the same thing and therefore there is a famous quote which says “a language is a dialect with an army and navy”. Both parts of this quote is important, “A language is a dialect” - what beautiful way of defining a dialect! And making the conclusion emphatic that there is no distinction between a language and a dialect - a language is a dialect. Recall our discussions on language and varieties. We underlined that individuals only speak varieties because language include several varieties within.

So the term dialect or language go all the way to making distinction between languages of individuals which is also called idiolect. But that will help us understand the term language and dialect, that when we speak different varieties then what we speak is actually dialect. Therefore the definition of dialect can only be: a language is a dialect. The second part of this quote puts stronger point that when people try to make an attempt to distinguish the two and call one language and the other dialect, it simply means that what people call language and that is

possible, it is possible to call something language compared to something else to is dialect only in the presence of army and navy, that is, the army and navy here are used to indicate might and strength. So what people with power would speak would be considered language. And the language of the underprivileged will or can easily be termed as dialect and that is the distinction of social and political load on the two terms.

However technically they are all the same. We would like to evaluate these two terms and reexamine the question of variety in the discussions of standard and what we call standard language. And next time, we will look at the notion of standard language for the understanding of language and society. Thank you.