

# **L**ANGUAGE AS A SOURCE OF HUMAN LIFE AND POWER

**H**AJJA KARU AHMAD SHERIFF; SADIQ MUSA USMAN; &  
**Y**AGANA GREMA

*Department of Language and Liberal Studies, Ramat polytechnic Maiduguri, PMB 1070, Maiduguri, Borno State.*

## **ABSTRACT**

**T***his paper attempts to explore language as source of human life and power. Language is a system of communication possessed and used by human. This system of communication set humans apart from other creatures. Also language is inseparable from the human race therefore it develops in humans and that why it is part their culture and civilization. Apart from this language is a powerful tool for communication and its power allows humans to argue, persuade and to dominate.*

**Keywords:** *Language, human, life, power, communication.*

**O**f language helps human being to regulate, dominate and persuade. In addition to this, it is man's unique possession. Language is possessed by only human being that is why it is a source of human life and power.

## **Introduction:**

Language is one of the distinctive characteristic of human beings. Through language, human beings communicate, create, respond and document civilization. Language is considered to be the main feature of human beings and it is what differentiates human beings from other creatures. It is also an instrument of thought, because it is through language that human express what they think. Language empowers human being and without language human being would not be able to deal with conflict, make decision and argue. Also, the power

### What is Language?

Language is a system of communication used by human beings. This system of communication has unique features that differentiate it from other forms of communication. According to Kerton (2009), language is what determines the meaning of words and signs and what combines them into meaningful whole that add up to conversation, speech, essay, epic and essay. Language goes beyond that, it is what makes your thought truly meaningful and what builds your idea into structured whole (Kerton, 2009). Even when you think in images, languages is what put those images together to make a meaningful whole, rather than just disordered tangled views.

More so, language is the ability to acquire complex system of communication, particularly the human ability to use the language to communicate. According to Baya and Suri (2015) "language is divine gift of God. It is language that distinguishes man from the animal world." To philosophers, language may be an instrument of thought for man think through language. Language is an extremely important way of interacting with people around. It is the vital tool for communication (Baya and Suri, 2005). Language is further defined as rule governed system that allows its users to generate meaning and in the process to define reality. Language is rule-governed because it has rule to combine sounds into words, words into sentences. Sapir (1921) views language as "purely human and non-instinctive method of communication of ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntary produced symbol." Language is basically a system of communication where sign convey objects, actions and ideas. According to Clarke, Eschholz, Rose (1981) human language uses the channel of sound generated by organs of speech and perceived by ear as its primary mode. They further assert that human language is transmitted by culture; we live in, not parentage. Hall (1968) asserts that language is "the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of arbitrary used oral auditory symbol. Language is therefore a system of communication that belongs to human beings. It is the essence of human life because language separate human from the animal world.

### Features of Language

Fromkin and Rodman (1998) and Yule (2010) present the features of language as follows:

- i. Arbitrariness
- ii. Creativity
- iii. Productivity/creativity
- iv. Displacement
- v. Cultural transmission
- vi. Duality
- vii. Reflexivity

**Arbitrariness:** This feature of language shows that there is no “natural connection between linguistic form and its meaning. This means that the name of the object has no direct relationship with the meaning of the object.

**Creativity/Productivity:** It is ability to produce new expression and noise utterances by manipulating the linguistic resources to describe new objects and situation. In other words, it is ability to combine words to form phrases and phrases to form sentences.

**Displacement:** This feature of language enables language users to talk about things and events not present in the immediate environment. Displacement allows us to talk about things and places whose existence cannot be ascertain.

**Cultural transmission:** This feature of language is a process whereby a language is passed on from one generation to the next. However, we were not born with the ability to produce utterance in specific language; we acquire first language as children in a culture.

**Duality:** This feature sees language as having two layers simultaneously. In speech production, we have the distinct sound and the distinct meaning. Distinction does not provide an intrinsic meaning but with the combination of sound we get distinct meaning from the sound.

**Reflexivity:** The property of language that accounts for the fact that we can use language to think and talk about language itself, making it one of the distinguishing features of human language.

However, Trenholm (2005) views the characteristics of spoken human language as:

1. Language is symbolic: to communicate, people must find a way to express the ideas that originate from their mind.

2. Language is a kind of knowledge: language is mental rather than physical. Language is body of knowledge shared within the brain. As such it can never be examined directly but must be inferred from speech.
3. Language is rule governed and productive: the linguistic knowledge allows us to understand sentences we have never heard before. The ability to understand and create unusual sentences is called linguistic productivity. When we learn language, we don't need to learn rules that allow us to generate meaning.
4. Language affects the way we see the world: Human language is closely related to thought. Some thought are purely visual; most of them are filtered through language.

### **Function of Language**

Language has the following functions according to Baya and Suri (2015)

- i. Language is the primary vehicle of communication
- ii. Language reflects both the personality of the individual and culture of the society
- iii. Language makes possible growth and transmission of culture and the continuity of society function and control of social group

According to Benjamin Whorf, "language shares thought and emotions, determining one's perceptions of reality". Language is a tool to transmit information, learn knowledge, express feeling, emotions and ideas and construct identity.

### **Language as Source of Human Life**

Language is a source of life because, it is what make possible the interaction and communication among human beings. Without interaction and communication it is not possible for human beings to be part a given society. Language is a source of life because it is also part of our culture. Culture shapes the way of life in human. Also, language is knowledge, without knowledge of a language; human beings are always left in the dark. Humans will not be able to express wants and needs without language.

Language as important source of human life serves the following purposes:

- a) Language is the primary vehicle of communication,
- b) Language reflects both the personality of the individual and culture of the society,

- c) Language makes possible growth and transmission of culture and the continuity of society function and control of social group.
- a) Language is the primary vehicle of communication because is the tool human use to interact with one another, express their feelings and thought and it is through language human get what they need and want. Language is vital in human life because they use the language to achieve their goal life. In order to achieve the goal in life, human need to have a language to communicate with people around. Also, language is significant in the life of human beings because it is through language we get know people around us. Without language, interaction will not possible and human will not able to know one another. Apart from this, language makes possible to humans to understand all that is going around him. Therefore, language is the primary source communication in human being.
- b) Language reflects both the personality of individual and culture of the society: this is so because language identifies an individual, it tells who the person is and where he comes from. It is only through language an individual portrays his personality in the society. Language also reflects culture because culture shape the way of life in the society. The cultural ties in the society are maintained through language without language such ties will not be created.
- c) Language makes possible growth and transmission of culture and continuity of society function and control of social group: this means the growth of the society depends on language. The use of language in the society helps in development of the society. Language makes it possible for a society to exist, because without a language, society is not functional. Societies only exist with language. Language is important in the life of human because it helps in the transmission of culture from generation to generation. The culture of given society is alive because its members preserve the culture handed to them by their ancestors this possible through language. Language also makes it possible for a society to continue to exist and also to control it social group. It is through language that the social groups in the society become functional and the members of the society will be able control and maintain the existence the society.

According to Hall (2005) language plays a major role in our collective existence, pervading all our activities not least of our working lives. Also,

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*Bayero University, Kano, PMB 3011, Kano State, Nigeria. +234 (0) 802 881 6063.*



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language is what makes human, maybe it is the thing that makes us human (Kerton, 2009). Language is a key to human lives. It can eliminate misunderstanding by using its instrument to transfer communication. It is the one of the indispensable instrument for creating ties without which unified social action is impossible. Language can be said to be at the core of humanity. It is part of what makes men fully human. Language is necessary in order for man to be a rational creature.

Moreover, language is what made growth of civilization possible. Apart from this, language is social by nature and men are inseparably connected with people who create and use it. It grows and develops with the development of the society. Thus, Chomsky (1967) opines that “to come to know human language would be extraordinary intellectual achievement for a creature not specifically designed to accomplish this task. A normal child acquires his knowledge on relatively slight exposure and without specific training”. This means that language is part of the human life; they acquire the knowledge of the language without specific training. Bolinger (1986) is also of the view that “Language was simply part of the development of human race, inseparable from them”. This means that language and human are inseparable. Language develops in human and therefore it is part of human life.

Furthermore, the possession of language is more than any attribute, it distinguishes human from other animals (Fromkin and Rodman). According to Fromkin and Rodman (1998), “to understand our humanity, one must understand the nature of the language”. According to philosophy expressed in myth and religion of many people, language are the source of human life and power (Fromkin and Rodman, 1998). For them, the African perceived that a new born baby is “kintu” and a “thing” not yet a “muntu” a “person.” The baby will be human only after he acquires the language that is, having the knowledge and understand the language while communicating with others. Fromkin and Rodman (1998) posit that a person will have the capacity to produce sounds that signifies certain meaning to understand and interprets the sounds produce by others.

Bennet (1968) of the view, that language is the most distinctive of human activities. It is difficult to disentangle the component, because they spill over human personality itself. Therefore, language is a component that is inseparable from human. Baya and Suri (2015) posit that society and language are correlative terms. Language is social product springing up with the first community, developing with interest and needs of a culture

of a civilization and disappearing when society disappears. The longer society exists, the richer is the language. Language plays crucial role in the life of human being. The role of language is not restricted to being a means of communicating thought and ideas to the others, but had also become tool for establishing friendships cultural ties as well as economic relationship. Language is extremely important way of interacting with people around us.

Language is also not only the principal medium of the human being use to communicate with each other, but also the bind that links people together and bind them to their culture. To understand our humanity therefore we must know the language because the language makes us human.

More so, Bolton (1992) asserts that language is so built into way people live that it has become an axiom of being human. It is what makes it possible much of what we do, and perhaps even what we think without language we would not. Specify our wishes, our needs, practical instruction, that make possible cooperation without language we have to grunt and gesture rather than to talk or tell. Without language we will live in isolation from our ancestors (Bolton, 1992).

### **Language as a source of power**

Language as source of power is the ability to use the language to get what we want. Therefore, language is power; indeed, it is the principal source we use to know ourselves and others. The mastery of a language is a key to knowledge, self identity and benefits and traits of group membership (Hall, 2005).

Language provides the essential social energy that powers most of our cultural processions. It is the power of language that allows us to define and project our personalities in the social world, to seek freedom and exercise individual will by knowing about how others think and more able to understand ourselves.

Apart from this, Trenholm (2005) posits that, the nature of our language affects the nature of our thoughts. The Sapir whorf expresses this idea which consists of two hypotheses:

- Linguistic determinism: is the theory of how language determines thought and
- Linguistic relativity: people from different languages communicate and perceive the world differently.

Language has powerful effect on the way we think about the experience of the world. Although we can completely be prisoners of language, it is easy to overlook the extent to which our language habits affect our views of the world (Trenholm, 2005).

Furthermore, language is a powerful tool. It allows us to abstract and store experiences and to share them with others. It also allows us to influence, regulate, persuade and dominate one another. It make us human and yet despite the great power, it gives us, language exerts power over us (Trenholm, 2005). Our thought and perception are filtered through language and can be distorted by it.

In words of Aldous Huxley:

*“by Possessing language we are capable of intellectual achievement beyond the scope of any animal but at the same time capable of systematic silliness and stupidity such as no dumb, beast could ever dream of, it is important then to use language with care and sensitivity realizing that it can lead to astray as often as it can lead us to truth.”*

Also, the use of language yields states of affairs in the world. Word literally has power to change the way the world is. For example; the utterance of certain words by certain people can result in a war (Hall, 2005). However, power of language allows us to satisfy the basic function such as describing ideas, making request and solving problems (Alder 1997). But beyond this uses, the way we use language also influences others and reflects our attitude in more subtle way. Also, the power of language shapes ideas have been recognized throughout the history (Alder, 197).

However, being able to communicate is not the same as having language. Having language means that you are able to communicate in such a way that others understand you. Language becomes more powerful when understood by wider community than just those closest to you. Power grows when you can communicate for more reasons to more people. The more powerful your language, the more independent you become and more you can contribute to the community.

Moreover, the power of language makes it possible to for a language to be performative. Some languages are more like an action than information. For example, words like “I promise”, “I guarantee” or “I pledge” does more than conveying meaning: it communicates intent. Promises can be broken, but there can be consequences. Apart from this, the utterance of the two

simple words “I do” can mean that person has agreed to an oath before taking a witness stand or assuming the presidency. In this sense, language is more a mere words. Performative language can also have the power to control, especially in legal language context. The languages that make our laws are vague. This is because the written language needs to be interpreted. The utterances of the judges and juries need to be interpreted reasonably. So that it help to decide future cases. Imagine how powerful the words “We jury find the dependant ....” The words are powerful because they impose fines, penalties or even death. Some languages are powerful that why it is regulated.

Language is only a key component of communication, it is also a key aspect identify. The words you choose to use become part of who you are. Through language you became part of community. The more you master a language the more powerful your connection with community. Language affects our credibility because people make assumption based on how you speak and what you say. The power to use language clearly portrays a human being as been trustworthy. For example, politician and many others in leadership positions need to be able to use the language to put people to believe in them. Also, language has the power to control human. Control is a word that has negative connotation, but it can be use in positive, neutral and negative way. For instance, human can use words to praise someone in form of positive reinforcement, while, human can also use words in crucial, aggressive or hurtful way as form of negative reinforcement.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, language is a system of conventionalized communication used by human. It is what set him apart as a human being. The possession of a language makes him human therefore; it has unique features and functions. Language plays an important role in the life of a human being because it is a powerful tool possessed by human. It is through language that human being use different ways to communicate effectively. Therefore, language is a source of human life and power.

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