

AN APPRAISAL OF THE INTERWOVEN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION.

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Abstract

The need for human interaction right from creation is obviously inevitable. Immediately humans were created by God, the stage for the need for interaction was set. The question then is, by what means will this interaction take place? Language and communication are two interwoven concepts that are responsible in meeting the need of human interaction. The two concepts have been used interchangeably or sometimes as synonyms that serve the same or similar function. This paper is therefore an appraisal of the interwoven relationship between language and communication. The paper unravels the confusion and

misunderstanding associated with the two terms. The study also draws the thin line between the two by using ACT and MEANS to show their distinct functions yet the two play a complementary and dependability (dependency) role to each other. The paper ends by pointing to the fact that the two cannot be mutually exclusive rather the nature or the reason for an interaction by humans determine when, which or both could be used.

Key Words: Language, Communication. Interaction, Act and Means

Introduction

In many cases, the words 'Language' and 'Communication' are used interchangeably. We use either or both of them to mean speaking person to person. However, there is a distinct dichotomy between the two terms, language vs. communication. Language and communication are different things but share certain characteristics when it comes to passing across information. Language is surely the most important tool of communication that individuals have at their disposal. This is because it is language that permits people to communicate. The purpose of acquisition of language as proved by Chomsky is for communicative purposes.

This paper does not intend looking at the two terms in isolation but to consider their dependence on each other and complementarity in usage. Apparently, the two terms share much in common but differ remarkably in their functions. This is what this work sets out to achieve by simply highlighting their meeting point and also point of divergence.

The Appraisal Approach

It has been noted from the very onset of this paper that language and communication are not the same. In other words, language cannot be equated to communication. Communication can take place perfectly without language as we find in the paralinguistic features which are aspects of communication that do not involve words.

Although we are not invariably limiting language to only words or sounds. In the same vein, going by Crystal view of language that sees it as “a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures or marks having understood meanings” (396). Put differently, paralinguistics are parts of communication outside of the words themselves. But it should be noted here that there are some paralinguistics that have conventional acceptance in some speech community and could also be seen as language (means of communication) which is in consonant with Crystal's definition of language encompassing signs, gestures and marks. They add emphasis or shades of meaning to what people say in the process of communicating. For instance, the body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone and pitch of voice are all examples of paralinguistic features that make it possible for communication to take place without the use of verbal or written language. However, in the view of some scholars, effective communication can only take place through the instrumentality of language. That without language, there will be no precision and preciseness in communication. In fact, ambiguity will certainly be embedded in the communication processes. It is in view of this that the thrust of this work is hinged on:

i. Communication as an Act

The root word for activity is 'act'; it denotes to perform an action or which simply describes a situation where by someone is seen as being involved in an activity or a particular task that can be described or identified. The word connotes an action that is being carried out. An act is not a means or medium rather it is the real thing that

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someone is involved or doing.

Communication is described as an ACT of exchanging ideas, information or message from one person to another via words or signs which are understood by both the parties. According to Hasan (2), communication is not just an act. It is a process. The process of communication includes transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, knowledge by using symbols, words, pictures, figures, graphs or illustrations. The act of communication is referred to as 'transmission'. It is the process of transmission that is generally termed communication.

Communication is therefore a process of sharing or exchange of ideas, information, knowledge, attitude or feeling between two or among more persons through certain signs and symbols.

What do we find from the above definition? It says that two or more persons are involved in the act, the one who gives information (sender) and the one who receives it (receiver).

What is being shared? An idea or information, or an attitude (message) is being shared.

And through what means? The information is shared or exchanged through certain signs and symbols; it could be language, oral or written.

Ugande (1) identifies two dominant models which influence the examination of the term communication. These are; the **Transmission** model and the **Interaction** model. The early studies in the area of communication were guided by the transmission model of communication. According to this view, communication is a means of moving or transmitting ideas from the mind of one person to the mind of another (Black and Bryant 26).

First, the model assumes communication to be in a straight – line activity. Also, it assumes the passivity of the receiver, that is, he or she attends to the message unquestionably. It reduces communication to mere message sending with receiver passively attending to the message without feedback or response.

On the other hand, recent research in the nature of communication has produced an alternative view known as the interaction model communication. According to this model, communication is seen as; “A process through which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding” (Rogers and Kunciad 63).

This definition of communication assumes the activity of both the senders and the receivers. In creating and sharing of information, there is often a reversal of roles because the sender becomes receiver and the receiver becomes sender. In this model, communication

is not conceived as mere message sending. Instead, it is considered as a process requiring the responses of others. The model assumes communication to be participatory or transactional process in which those involved have equal access to communication process. In this model of communication, dialogue is of essence.

ii. Language as a Means

There are instances where language has been defined assuming it to be a medium or channel of transmitting information. Such definitions could be misleading or misdirecting because language is not a channel but a means, and this implies that it is 'an instrumentality for accomplishing something'. By this we are insinuating that language is described as a tool which helps in the transmission of feelings and thoughts, from one person to the other. It is the means of expression of what a person feels or thinks, through arbitrary produced symbols or sounds, such as words, (spoken or written), signs, sounds, gesture, posture, etc., that convey a certain meaning.

Therefore, considering language as a channel or medium will amount to seeing it rather as a passage, or like a pipe through which something passes. For instance, in a normal communication process, there are elements of communication which include source/speaker, message/information, receiver/audience and medium/channel. In his effort to delineate what medium/channel is as one of the elements of communication, states that “medium could be regarded as the form adopted by the sender of the message to get it to the receiver” (Ahmad 194). On the channel he opines that:

The channel then is the pathway, route or conduit through which the message travels between the source and the receiver. The channel can be radio, television, newspaper, telephone, microphone, stones, leaves, smoke, songs, drama, talking, drums etc. Channel provides a link that enables the source and the receiver to communicate (Ahmad 194).

It is obvious that language plays a different role in the communication process that is not quite same with channel and medium of communication. Language in the context of our discussion could be seen as the 'code', 'tongue', 'dialect' or 'speech' with which we use to communicate. Though in its broad and inclusive concept, language covers the meaning of communication, but it does not take the place of communication as an act when interlocutors are involved in the process of passing across or sharing of information.

iii. The Interwoven Relationship of Language and Communication

Where language is a tool, communication is an experience. They are not the same thing, yet, they work together. Below is an illustration of the dependency and complementarity of language and communication.



Fig. 1 Above shows the interdependence and the interwoven nature of language and communication. Both started and stand separately from the figure but there is a fusion at a point.

It is therefore at this point penitent to examine the concomitance or the accompaniment of the two concepts under these three sub-headings.

i. At What Point is Language Needed in Communication?

Language has always been an important source of communication. In fact, language is crucial to get the message across, making others understand through expressions or gestures would have been complicated in the absence of language hence the importance of language for communication cannot be denied at any point. Therefore, at what point of communication do we require the use of language? The simple response to the above question is at every point of communication for the purposes of achieving clarity and effectiveness in communication.

However, it is obvious that there are certain communications that may not necessarily require the use of words either verbal or written words. For instance, we may not need words for commuters to interpret the traffic colours and what they stand for i.e. red for stop and green for go at a traffic point. The colours do the communication without expression of words either written or spoken. Another example could be that of cloth. Sometimes certain outfits or attires speaks for themselves or communicate the occasion the wearers are set to attend or perform. In these instances, language may not be required to communicate because with such colour and clothes, communication had already taken place.

We should not however, forget that even in some not all nonverbal communication, there were undertones of language usage or foreknowledge of some things through language before they became symbols or norms today. For instance, the traffic light

colours earlier mentioned must have been taught, discussed, published, advertised; awareness created through language etc. before they are being used today without language attached to them yet could communicate on their own. This explicitly shows that even in some so-called nonverbal means of communication that we have today, at one point in time or the other must have gone through language engineering or influence before people could arrive at a common knowledge of what they are used to communicate even in the absence of language. Therefore, to answer the question, at what point is language needed in the communication processes? The answer will be at all times to express, argue, declare and establish a norm for nonverbal communication in some instances.

ii To What Extent Can Communication Take Place Without Language?

Often, we think that communication means only in words. This is because mostly we use words while communicating. Written communication occurs through printed or written words. And oral communication occurs through words spoken 'out loud'. But not all communication use words.

Will it then be right to infer that language is the sole means of communication? At what point can communication take place without language? It is important at this point to note that communication can take place without using language. In the National Teachers' Institute' module (2), it arguably states that "Communication can take place perfectly without language as we find in the paralinguistic features".

The above claim is upheld because on the overall, communication has a wider scope than language, as communication encompasses language. A good analogy of the relationship between language and communication is to look at communication as the car, and language as the road. The car of communication goes down another road (another language), or even go off-roading.

For instance, language allows us to communicate in variety of ways, but it is only one set of tools in the longer scheme. Beside language, the communication toolset is comprised of things like empathy, knowledge, body language, facial expressions and intonation.

In the same vein, Hasan (180) attesting to the fact that communication can take place without language, however notes that "the nonverbal media has comparatively very limited range". She further

identifies what constitutes nonverbal communication thus:

Everything from the simple shrug of the shoulder, the V-sign, the OK ring, the thumbs up gestures, eye movements, facial expressions, body postures, gestures, gait, clothing to the tone of the voice, the accent. Non-verbal components of communication also involve the use of space, of touch and smell and paralanguage (180).

It is obvious from the above that communication expands beyond verbal or written communication and nonverbal communication is also seen as a vital aspect of communication that cannot be ignored. In view of this, Hasan (21) further states that non-verbal communication plays an important role in any communication situation. It often plays a supplementary role to the verbal content delivered orally. Sometimes, non-verbal symbols communicate on their own. More specifically, non-verbal communication serves the following functions:

- a. Repeating verbal meanings
- b. Substituting verbal messages
- c. Complementing verbal messages
- d. Regulating or accenting verbal messages
- e. Deception

From the foregoing, it is evident that communication can take place without the use of language. However, the issue we must not forget to ponder on is, to what extent will such communication be effective and comprehensive enough to achieve intelligibility among interlocutors? This question will certainly require another research to unravel the extent to which communication can take place without language, it could be effective.

iii Key Differences Between Communication and Language

These two terms are so closely intertwined that people cannot easily recognize their differences and end up using them synonymously. But in reality, there exist a line of difference between language and communication. In his attempt to unravel the dichotomy between the two, Surbhi (3) identifies five distinct detail differences between language and communication which are;

1. The system of communication which relies on the verbal or non-verbal codes used in transferring information, is called language. The way of interchanging message or information

between two or more people is called communication,

2. A language is a tool of communication, while communication is the process of transferring messages to one another,
3. Language focuses on the signs, symbols, and words. Communication lays emphasis on message.
4. Before invention of written words, language was confined to the auditory channels. However, it can occur in visual, tactile and other sensory channels too. On the other hand, communication occurs in all sensory channels.
5. The basics of communication do not change at all. Conversely, daily new words are added to the dictionary of the language, so it changes every day.

So, with the above explanation, it is clear that communication has a wider scope than language as the former covers the latter. Language is the essence of communication without which, it cannot exist. Or put differently, as a coin; side one is language and the other side is communication.

Conclusion

In this paper, attempt had been made to delineate the thin line between language and communication. The inability to substantially understand and categorise them accordingly by many often create noxious effect in their usage. From the study, it has been established that language and communication are closely related concepts but they have distinct differences. This study has therefore brought to bear their differences in terms of nature and scope, purpose, components, using ACT and MEANS to bring about the clarity.

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