

“LANGUAGE AND AWARENESS”

ABSTRACT

Language awareness covers a wide spectrum of fields including exploring the benefits that can be derived from developing a good knowledge about language, a conscious understanding of how languages work, of how people learn them and use them. It is defined as an explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.

Can we become better language users, learners or teachers if we develop a better understanding? And can we gain other advantages in our relations with other people or cultures, and in our ability to see through language? Language awareness also include learning more about what sorts of ideas about language people normally operate with, and what effects these have on how they conduct their everyday affairs.

As a system of vocal sounds transformed into spoken words and written symbols by which human beings express themselves, for centuries, human mind constructs thoughts and applies them into language. Through language, people express their inner thoughts, producing sounds and writings.

This paper gives overview of the concept of language awareness, depicting the language as a complex combinations of principles and historical accidents, with no single explanatory theory of language, focusing on the connection between the language, on one hand, and the awareness, on the other hand, seen as the totality of metacognitive skills needed to allow reflecting on language as an object and the monitoring of one's own language use and that of others.

Keywords: *Language, awareness, knowledge*

1. Introduction

Humanity has always been exploring the origin and development of the language and its connection to the human mind. How old is the language? When did it come from? What is the connection between language and human mind, between language and awareness? Many philosophical views appear on the horizon. It is clear that the language is a prerequisite for human interaction, a tool for people's communication with each other.

As a system of vocal expressions transformed into spoken words and written symbols by which human beings express themselves, for centuries human mind constructs thoughts and applies them into language. Through language, people express their inner thoughts, ideas and images. Language is the gateway of the mind and a bridge that connects us to other human beings. Language enables a person to share their clandestine inner world with other human beings and to learn about other people's mysterious world of logical thoughts and poetic sentiments¹. It was formed as a result of the human need for expression, without having a single explanatory theory on the language formation and its origin.

2. Consciousness, diversity & awareness

2.1. Consciousness and language diversity

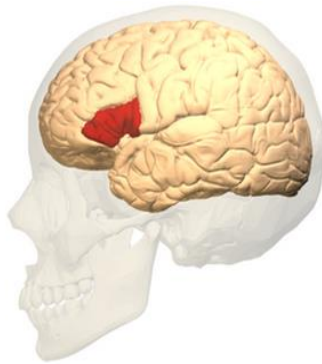
Consciousness as a state of mind can be linked to the understanding of the existence of language diversity, of how different languages have historically evolved in different cultures, of how people learn and use languages. On the other hand, language awareness can be defined as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.”² What does not appear in language does not exist. Without language, our consciousness loses its essence. Just to imagine something and express our feelings about it is impossible without language. We need language to be able to capture our thoughts. Broca's area, located in the frontal lobe of the brain, is linked to speech production, and also plays a significant role in language comprehension, working in conjunction with working memory to allow a person to use verbal expression and spoken words (*Please see Image 1*).³

¹ Oldster, J. K. [2016]. *Dead Toad Scrolls*, Booklocker.com, Inc [Online]. Available at <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/51850408-dead-toad-scrolls> [Accessed 18 November 2020].

² Definition by Association for Language Awareness (ALA) [Online]. Available at https://lexically.net/ala/la_defined.htm [Accessed 3 November 2020]

³ Broca's area [Online]. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broca%27s_area [Accessed 2 November 2020].

Image 1: Broca's area (shown in red)



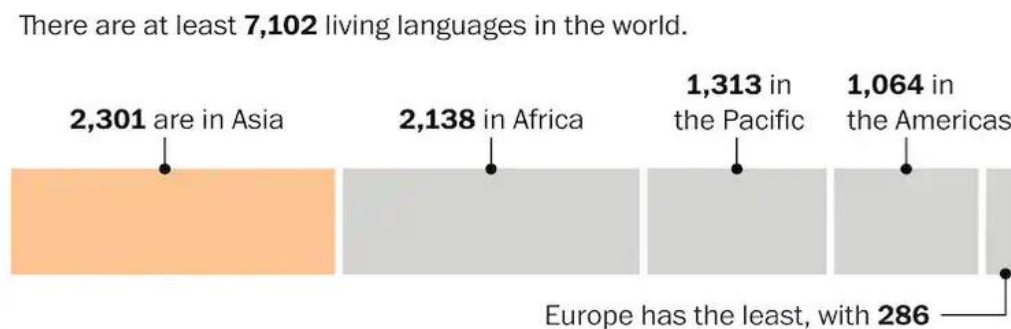
Source: Wikipedia [Online].

Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broca%27s_area

Language use requires differentiated language structures, words and sentences in different contexts and situations. There are words that could motivate and uplift the human spirit and words that could inflict pain and despair. There are other extremes as well. Language use itself has different meaning when it comes to explaining the colors of, for example, blind people. Consciousness exists in vegetative state patients (Shea and Bayne, 2010)⁴ who cannot use the language in such condition. Dealing with the miracle and healing power of language opens up new perspectives in order to deal constructively with each and every difficulty and to shape life in a self-determined way.

Language is also linked to the communication as a special process of social interaction that involves exchange of thoughts and ideas between two or more people. It also expresses people's feelings or, more importantly, their behavior. All behavior is communication⁵ (Dennett, 1978) and every communication causes behavior. It seems like a simple and easy process, but it is actually a complex process of activities where there is a lot of room for misinterpretation, especially when different cultures and languages collide (*Please see Tables 1 and 2*).

Table 1: Language representation by continents



Source: Ethnologue of the World. 18th edition [Online].

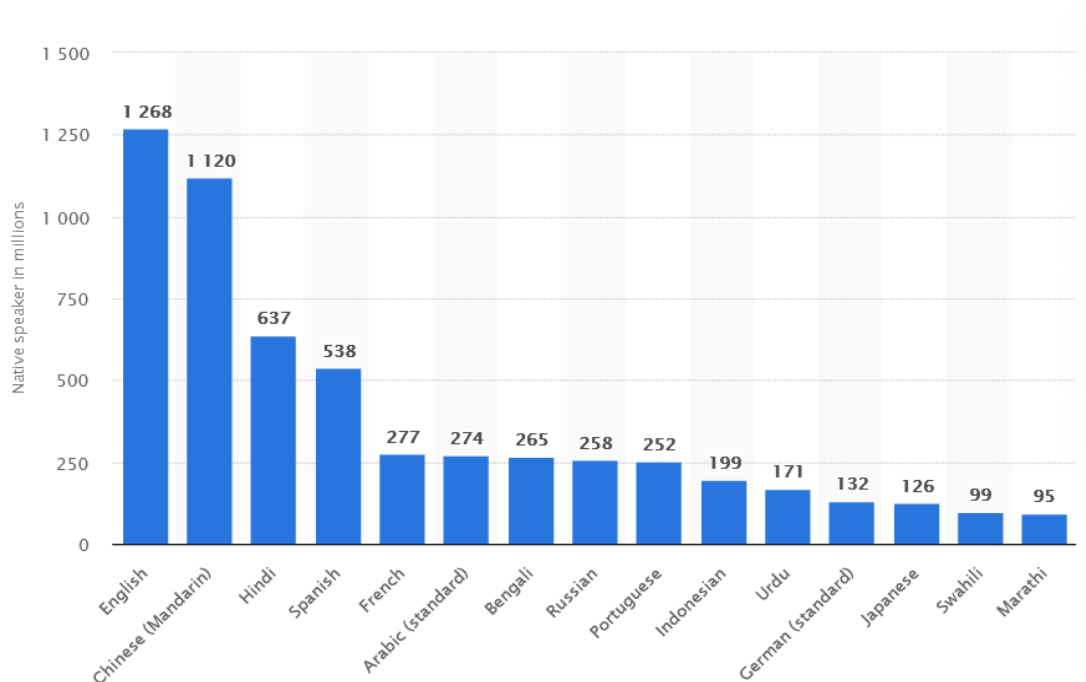
Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/23/the-worlds-languages-in-7-maps-and-charts/>

[Accessed 1 November 2020]

⁴ Shea, N. and Bayne, T. [2010]. *The Vegetative State and the Science of Consciousness*, The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Volume 61, Issue 3, p.459-484.

⁵ Denett, D. [1978]. *Beliefs about beliefs*, Article in Behavioral and Brain Sciences, p. 568-570.

Table 2: The most spoken languages worldwide in 2019 (by speakers in millions)



Source: Statista Research Department [Online].

Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/>
[Accessed 1 November 2020]

Language has a strong connection with linguistic awareness involving not only awareness of existence of different languages and the diversity of the ways they are spoken, but also understanding the relationship between the language cultures and how the use of language varies in different social contexts. The preservation of language is of great importance because it serves to unite people, culturally connect the generations that pass on to each other the civilizational values of humanity, for mutual identification of people in the community where they realize their social and national emancipation. Nurturing one's own language means the existence of a people who can freely express their thoughts, feelings and actions. Language is the greatest cultural heritage and the awareness of people should be built towards its preservation.

2.2. Language - a unique human trait

Language is a universal and innate human ability. Every person is born with the ability to use a certain language by possessing a speech apparatus, sensory apparatus, central and peripheral nervous system, etc. The general predisposition to speak a certain language is innate. Languages are also historical documents because vast amount of information about our past is inscribed in the content and structure of more than 7000 languages that are spoken today⁶.

Language is a necessary element of everyday life; without language, there will be no form of communication at all. It is a human creation, where words are created to mean a particular thing through visualising our image of the world by thinking then naming things.⁷

The nature of language is different. It perfectly showcases the ability to produce and comprehend both spoken and written (and in the case of sign language, signed) words. Understanding how language works means reaching across many branches of science, from basic neurological functioning to high-level cognitive processing. Language shapes our social interactions and brings order to our lives. Complexity of the language is one of the defining factors that makes us human⁸. Human language is generative, which means that it can communicate an infinite number of ideas from a finite number of parts; recursive, which means that it can build upon itself without limits, and also uses displacement, which means that it can refer to things that are not directly present.

The social nature of language is perceived through the use of language by members of a society. Language and society are interrelated. There is no language without a society, nor society without a language. Every language is good as long as it serves the members of the society that uses that language. Through language people express their thoughts, desires and needs. Through connection of language with thought, the psychological nature of language is expressed. The sign nature of language refers to the representation of every object or every phenomenon of reality with a certain linguistic sign. Human language has a limited number of signs, but the possibilities for combining those linguistic signs are unlimited. For example, a language has a limited number of sounds, but combining them creates a large number of words. Language is a system of signs with its own structure. Each language is described as a unity of form (the linguistic units of which it is composed, which are the sounds, words and sentences) and content (refers to the meaning that linguistic units have). The structure is defined as a whole composed of parts in which each part depends on the other parts i.e. all parts of that whole are mutually conditioned.

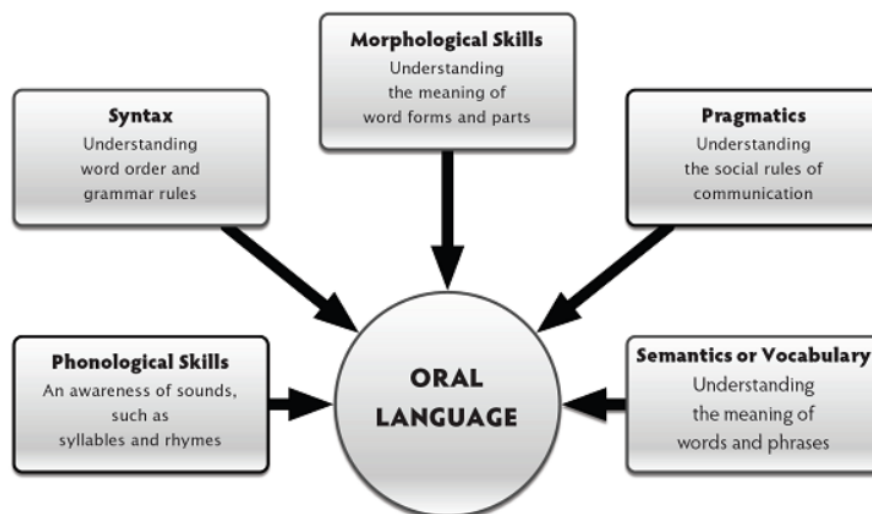
⁶ Gray, R. D., Atkinson, Q. D., & Greenhill, S. J. [2011]. Language evolution and human history: What a difference a date makes. *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences*, 366(1567), p.1090–1100.

⁷ CRAM, Essay On The Importance, Of Language [Online]
Available at <https://www.cram.com/essay/Essay-On-The-Importance-Of-Language/F32VLV79J5XW>
[Accessed 6 December 2020]

⁸ Lumen Boundless Psychology, Introduction to Language [Online]
Available at <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-psychology/chapter/introduction-to-language/>
[Accessed 8 December 2020]

Language (oral) is also a system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings. Developing oral language means developing the skills and knowledge that go into listening and speaking-all of which have a strong relationship to reading comprehension and to writing. Its structure is comprised of at least five key components (*Please see Table 3*).

Table 3: Oral Language Components



Source: Heinemann blog, [Online].
Available at <https://blog.heinemann.com/what-is-oral-language>
[Accessed 22 November 2020]

These components include phonological skills, pragmatics, syntax, morphological skills, and vocabulary (also referred to as *semantics*). All of them are necessary to communicate and learn through conversation and spoken interaction, but there are important distinctions among them that have implications for literacy instruction.⁹

The basic method for learning language is a systematic description of the language through various linguistic disciplines: phonetics - studies the formation and pronunciation of sounds; phonology - studies the voice as a semantic distinguishing unit with its own meaning; morphology - studies the forms of words; syntax - studies the combination of words into larger word sets (syntagms, sentences); lexicology - studies language from the point of view of its word composition; word formation - studies the ways of word formation; semantics - studies the meaning; dialectology - studies language from the point of view of the distribution of certain linguistic features in a certain geographical area, etc.

⁹ Heinemann blog [Online].
Available at <https://blog.heinemann.com/what-is-oral-language>
[Accessed 12 November 2020]

3. Language awareness in a multilingual, digital global society

With the world becoming increasingly interconnected, multilingualism and diversity have turned into a daily experience in various domains of life. Both language awareness and multilingualism can be combined, with language awareness playing an important role in the development of multilingualism¹⁰. Ongoing cross-border migration, enhanced mobility and globalization processes have made societies richer in cultural and language diversity. Can we become better language users, learners or teachers if we develop a better understanding of the other culture and linguistic specifics? And can we gain other advantages in our relations with other people from different cultures, and in our ability to see through language?

Language and cultural awareness also include learning more about what sorts of ideas about language people normally operate with, and what effects these have on how they conduct their everyday affairs. Both are intertwined since a particular language usually points out to a specific group of people. When we interact with another language, we also interact with the culture that speaks the language. We cannot understand one's culture without accessing its language directly.

Multiculturalism promotes dialogue by creating a space for different cultures to coexist around each other, allowing people from different cultures to interact on a regular basis, promoting dialogue and understanding.

Since the very beginning of humanity, people use the language as a code to communicate and share their inner thoughts. With the advance of technology and the fast network systems to spread this code, it has gone beyond the national borders. Linguistic diversity provides us an opportunity to broaden our horizons, and to learn more things from other cultures. Language was, is and will always be a primary mechanism for communicating information and knowledge, thus the opportunity to use one's language in today's digital era will determine the extent to which one can participate in emerging knowledge communities. Thus, respecting the vast cultural diversity and multilingualism plays an essential role in fostering pluralistic, equitable and inclusive global society.¹¹

¹⁰ Finkbeiner C., White J. (2017) *Language Awareness and Multilingualism: A Historical Overview*. In: Cenoz J., Gorter D., May S. (eds) *Language Awareness and Multilingualism*. Encyclopedia of Language and Education (3rd ed.). Springer, Cham.

¹¹ Linguistic diversity and multilingualism on Internet [Online]. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/themes/linguistic-diversity-and-multilingualism-internet> [Accessed 26 October 2020]

4. Conclusion

In today's technological era, the use of language becomes more complicated. Language transcends certain levels of communication, and is not just a system of certain linguistic signs and symbols with universal application.

Language awareness and the preservation of language as a unique creation are of great importance because language serves to unite people, culturally connect the generations that pass on to each other the civilizational values of humanity, and also for mutual identification of people in the society where they realize their social emancipation.

Nurturing one's own language means the existence of people who can freely express their thoughts, feelings, ideas and actions. Language is the greatest cultural heritage and the awareness of the generations should be developed for its preservation. Values of linguistic plurality and its cohesive role in linking diversity need to be constantly reaffirmed and nurtured. Instead an instrument for division, language should be a connective bridge for interaction in the diverse social community.

“Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.”
Oliver Wendell Holmes

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